

South Lassen Watersheds Strategic Planning Meeting VI
Tuesday, November 14th; Almanor Recreation Center; 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Meeting Synopsis

The South Lassen Watersheds Group met in Chester, CA to discuss, primarily, habitat and meadow conservation priorities and strategies. Ryan Burnett, of Point Blue Conservation Science, presented on meadow priorities, research, and opportunities for partnerships to advance restoration work. Ken Roby, aquatic ecologist, discussed a comprehensive fisheries assessment in the Upper Feather River Basin. Mountain Meadow Conservancy representatives presented on short and long-term goals for habitat conservation in areas surrounding Mountain Meadows Reservoir. Additionally, several group members discussed multiple grant proposals for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 1 Grant Program.

Attendees

Janie Ackley	Lassen NF	Ron Lunder	Mtn. Meadows Conservancy
Steve Buckley	Lassen Volcanic NP	Dan Martynn	NRCS
Ryan Burnett	Point Blue Conservation Science	Tom McCubbins	Tehama County RCD
Coye Burnett	Lassen NF	Mike Mitzel	Sierra Pacific Industries
Laura Corral	Lassen NF	Russell Nickerson	Lassen NF
Carlos Espana	Almanor Recreation & Park District	Charlie Plopper	Lake Almanor Watershed Group
Peggy Fulder	Mountain Meadows Conservancy	Rob Rianda	Tehama County RCD
Ryan Hilburn	W.M. Beaty & Associates	Ken Roby	Aquatic Ecologist
Kristy Hoffman	Sierra Nevada Conservancy	Aaron Seandel	Lake Almanor Watershed Group

Action Items

- **Sierra Institute** to distribute Tony Tooke article. **DONE**
- **Sierra Institute** to contact R. Nickerson regarding FLT meeting. **DONE**

Meeting Notes

Introductions

- Russell Nickerson, Acting Almanor District Ranger, was introduced to SLWG members.
- J. Kusel noted that Sierra Institute is acting as facilitator/coordinators on a volunteer basis. For this reason, critical outreach and stakeholder analysis has not yet occurred.

Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement (SCALE) meeting outcomes

- SCALE is a mechanism for a collaboration between collaborative groups working on landscape-scale forest restoration and community improvement across California.
- On November 2nd and 3rd, 2017, a SCALE workshop was held in Sacramento, CA. Over 40 participants from throughout the state attended.
- Collaborative groups are gaining more influence throughout California. There is top-down support of further incorporating collaboratives into USFS processes.
- There are numerous funding opportunities on the horizon for forest restoration. CAL FIRE has received \$200 million for their forest health program. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) will continue to administer Proposition 1 funding. Furthermore, the California legislature has approved a Parks Bond of over \$4 billion for parks and water projects throughout the state.
 - There is an open question of whether collaboratives will be ready to utilize this funding effectively.
- Group members asked for clarity on the purpose of SCALE.
 - SCALE's main function is working at a statewide and policy level to address the issues that forestry collaboratives are struggling with.
- N. Kent mentioned an article profiling Tony Tooke, the new USFS Chief; he is an advocate of new mechanisms, including the Good Neighbor Authority. **Action Item: Sierra Institute** to distribute Tony Tooke article.

Initial Wildlife Habitat Priorities (presentations)

Ryan Burnett, Point Blue Conservation Science

- Ryan Burnett, Sierra Nevada Group Director for Point Blue Conservation Science (Point Blue), gave a presentation on research and priorities for wildlife habitat.
- Point Blue is a member of the Sierra Meadows Partnership, which was formed to increase the pace and scale of meadow restoration throughout the Sierra Nevada. The goal of the partnership is to restore 30,000 acres of meadows.
- In short, the main priority is wet riparian meadows and fens, particularly those with associated streams.
- Birds respond quickly to habitat changes and are considered indicators of meadow health. R. Burnett displayed results from a meadow restoration project showing a rapid increase in bird populations.

- Possible meadow projects include:
 - Childs Meadows
 - Swain Meadow
 - Mountain meadows
 - Includes more meadow acres than most of the area combined
 - Rock Creek
 - Yellow Creek
 - Deer Creek Meadows
- R. Burnett noted that many of the projects mentioned have a nexus to other forest and fuels treatments.
- Candidate projects for aspen restoration include:
 - Robbers Creek
 - Connected to the USFS “Mini” project
 - Childs Meadows
 - Lost Creek
 - Yellow Creek / Humbug Valley
- Climate resiliency was discussed. In terms of “fireshed” management, how can the group work towards a wildland fire use area that is safe and effective? What are the components that contribute to that goal?
- Another component of climate resiliency is corridors and connectivity. A landscape strategy should include an assessment of connectivity to higher elevation forests.

Ron Lunder and Charlie Plopper, Mountain Meadows Conservancy

- Ron Lunder presented a priority project from the Mountain Meadows Conservancy.
- Goodrich Springs is one of the most important springs in California. It is located on the 101 road, across from the Bizz Johnson Trailhead.
- Mountain Meadows Conservancy proposes installing fencing to exclude cattle from a 6-acre plot. The plot would serve as a test to monitor the effects of cattle exclusion.
- A group member asked if there is already hydrology monitoring occurring in the area?
 - M. Mitzel indicated there might be some data from Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI).
- It is unclear how many cattle have gone through the springs, but there is a lot of trampling evidence.
- C. Burnett asked if there were any fen associated rare plants in Goodrich?

- There may be monkey flower.
- Fencing is a relatively easy addition to the proposed action for USFS projects. This particular area is on the Eagle Lake District, so there would need to be some coordination between Almanor and Eagle Lake districts.
- C. Plopper discussed habitat priorities around Mountain Meadows Reservoir.
- There are 168 bird species in the area, including five that are endangered or threatened. It is critical to preserve the area for better and consistent habitat.
- The east side of the reservoir is a priority. Mountain Meadows conservancy is working with the Feather River Land Trust to preserve PG&E lands as wildlife habitat.
- Another priority is allowing the public to access the reservoir in a sustainable manner. Currently, visitors drive indiscriminately around the reservoir to gain access. There is a proposal to establish a dedicated area for public access.
- The new public access area would have linkages to trails built on the FRLT property.
- The project is tentatively named the “Mountain Meadows Gateway”.

Ken Roby, Aquatic Ecologist

- Ken Roby presented on the Upper Feather River Basin-Wide Fish Assessment.
- Plumas National Forest (PNF) was the first organization to provide funding for this assessment. Trout Unlimited has also provided funding.
- Vincent Rogers, hired through the Sierra Institute as a field fellow, is completing much of the analysis.
- The project is utilizing Environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling, which is an effective way to measure biodiversity from water samples.
- The goals of the assessment are to inform protection, reconnection, and restoration of fisheries throughout the basin. Trout are considered the indicator species for this assessment.
- The approach includes a measure of resilience. Exposure + Condition = Resilience.

- The reporting units used in the assessment are “subwatersheds”; these are not a true hydrologic unit, however the USFS uses this unit to assess and report watershed condition. SPI also uses a similar reporting system.
- “Reaches” is another term used. Reaches describe big streams running through the basin; in the Upper Feather River, there are approximately 50 reaches.
- Exposure measures are related to climactic trends in the basin. The general trends are warming air temperatures, less snow, and lower base flows.
- Modeling shows temperature increases across the basin. There are higher increases in the west as elevation declines and smaller increases to the north.
- Physical indicators include roads, flow, channel conditions, and effects of high severity fire.
- One of the main biological factors is pathogens in fisheries. Trout are susceptible to certain pathogens that were detected in the basin.
- Connectivity is limited throughout the basin. This issue has become more prevalent in the last few decades. For example, roads create a significant barrier to connectivity. At least 75% of culverted crossings assessed were considered barriers to fish crossings. Connectivity in the basin is overall poor.
- K. Roby discussed the implications for the SLWG. The group focus area is considered some of the best habitat in the feather river basin. This area will continue to remain a priority if trends in hydrology and stream temperature continue.

Q&A

- It was noted that developing priorities will go a long way in determining what treatments and conditions to manage for. For example, Goodrich Springs has a lot of green vegetation and “looks good”, however, there may be more nuanced considerations regarding plants and wildlife that need to be considered to maintain the quality of the area.
- R. Burnett followed up with a call for defining group objectives. There is a lot of low hanging fruit in the watershed; there are numerous projects that may be considered “no regret” actions that will benefit multiple objectives and have minimal opposition.

- The Sierra Institute and Lassen Volcanic National Park (LVNP) submitted a grant proposal to restore fire regimes in the upper watersheds within the national park. The project consists of hand crews working in the wilderness areas of LVNP to prepare 1,600 acres for prescribed burning.
- The planned burn area is known as Flatiron Ridge. Flatiron is adjacent to the historic Drakesbad Guest Ranch and Warner Valley; it is a strategic location.
- It was noted that there are limitations in terms of forest management in the headwaters. Wilderness areas in LVNP and the Pacific Crest Trail have narrow guidelines for treatments. This project is a step in the right direction for introducing fire back on the landscape and work to our benefit.
- S. Buckley also mentioned an SNC planning grant that will hire an archaeologist and biologist to do survey work. The analyses will go towards more prescribed burning in the park.
- Collins Pine is partnering with the Tehama County RCD on two SNC grants as well.
- One grant is for implementation; the proposal includes a fuelbreak along a ridge in the Mill/Deer Creek corridor. Most of the area is private land, with USFS property adjacent.
- Treatments for the fuelbreak include hand thinning, mastication, herbicide. Typically, this type of work requires 50 ft. of treatment on either side of the road. This proposal includes 150 ft. on either side.
- D. Martynn commented on the scope of the project. 25 miles of fuelbreak is a significant project.
- There is another proposal for a planning grant. The proposal includes a Timber Harvest Plan (THP) for the Childs Meadows project. There is a research component included for water flows in the THP area.
- There was a conversation about mitigating conifer encroachment in meadows. In this area, the soils are wet and difficult to work on without causing damage. The best practice is to get in the meadows early before the encroachment has reached a critical level.
 - There are technologies that can mitigate soil damage in wet areas. Cut-to-length logging, for example, is a mechanism that reduces the amount of equipment and skidding required to harvest. **Future Meeting Topic:** meadow encroachment mitigation strategies

- R. Nickerson spoke to the state of the district. There is a strong need for more staffing, but there are administrative barriers. Also, Storrie Fire restoration remains the top priority for the district; the majority of resources are directed towards that priority.
- J. Kusel said that the feeling of frustration is not uncommon among collaborative groups when discussing USFS capacity for NEPA. Sierra Institute and others are exploring ways to form a local team of specialists to assist with the NEPA process. USFS leadership has been receptive to the idea, but the details are not fully worked out.
- R. Nickerson noted that he is interested in streamlining the NEPA process and looking at producing broader documents that allow more flexibility.

Project/Group Needs, Closing Remarks

- C. Espana described a property on the north end of the Almanor Peninsula. The area is a 1,400-acre parcel of private forestland adjacent to the Lake Almanor Country Club. At this point, the private land is a wildfire risk, and the Almanor Parks and Recreation District is interested in creating a shaded fuel break on the property to reduce the risk.
 - D. Martynn said he may be able to assist with this project as a NRCS representative.
- K. Roby gave some closing remarks. It is clear that the USFS has priorities in the short-term that are set in stone. However, if the group is to implement a landscape-level strategy, the USFS will need to be involved and, currently, there are very few priorities in Lassen National Forest as a whole that fall in this area.
- R. Nickerson understands the importance of communicating district priorities to the Lassen leadership. There will be a Forest Leadership Team meeting held in January, which the collaborative could be involved in.
 - **Action Item:** Sierra Institute to contact R. Nickerson regarding FLT meeting.

Moving forward with prioritization, next steps

- J. Ackley noted that if Almanor West is still being considered for a GNA agreement, then it should extend across the entire shore and link with the PNF Boat Launch project.
 - The group generally agreed with this approach.
- S. Buckley mentioned data sharing and its importance in the prioritization process. Considering the extent of the focus area, it is important to understand what information is available and begin to analyze the data.

- Similarly, understanding personnel needs across the different organizations/entities present is critical for efficiently planning and implementing projects. There is “unused capacity” throughout this region.
- J. Kusel emphasized the importance of strategic planning, but also recognized the group’s support for a project, or multiple projects, to “launch” the collaborative effort.
 - C. Espana agreed with this statement. It would be prudent to move projects forward and maintain enthusiasm within the group.

Closing Remarks

- R. Burnett asked that participants reflect on what “brings them to the table”. Priorities are likely to emerge out of a synthesis of interests from group members. **Future Meeting Topic**
- The group agreed to reconvene in early November. **Action Item: Sierra Institute** to schedule a meeting for early November, 2017.