



South Lassen Watersheds Planning Meeting VIII  
 Thursday, April 5<sup>th</sup>; Chester Fire Department, 13:00 - 16:00

Meeting Synopsis

The South Lassen Watersheds Group met in Chester, CA to discuss recently awarded and pending project funding, a Memorandum of Understanding for the group, and strategic planning developments. Small group sessions provided the strategic planning subcommittee with feedback from SLWG members, to be reflected in this ongoing effort.

Attendees

Jon Barrett (phone)	Tehama County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD)	Mike Kossow	Feather River Trout Unlimited (TU)
Steve Buckley	Lassen Volcanic National Park (LVNP)	Ron Lunder	Mountain Meadows Conservancy (MMC)
Nick Bunch	Plumas National Forest (PNF)	Ted McArthur	Lassen National Forest (LNF)
Ryan Burnett	Point Blue Conservation Science (PBCS)	Tom McCubbins (phone)	TCRCD
Laura Corral	Lassen National Forest (LNF)	Mike Mitzel	Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI)
Carlos Espana	Almanor Recreation and Park District (ARPD)	Rob Rianda (phone)	TCRCD
Carl Felts	Lake Almanor Watershed Group (LAWG)	Kathleen Schori	CAL FIRE
Nick Kent	Collins Pine	Alisha Wilson	Maidu Summit Consortium (MSC)

Action Items

The Sierra Institute will:

- Revise the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as discussed and re-circulate to MOU subcommittee
- Establish a recurring meeting date and location via email
- Send a draft agenda for upcoming SCALE meeting when available

Meeting Opening

Previous meeting notes (January, 2018) and the day’s agenda were accepted by a vote.

Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Proposition 1 Grant Updates

Two members of the group, the Sierra Institute and Collins Pine, were awarded Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 1 (Water Bond) funding in March, 2018.

S. Buckley (Lassen Volcanic National Park, LVNP) presented on behalf of the Sierra Institute and LVNP, who will partner on the “Improving Landscape and Watershed Health through Restoring Fire Regimes in Lassen Volcanic National Park” project. Sierra Institute is the grantee, with project work occurring on National Park Service lands. This planning grant was awarded to conduct archaeological and biological surveys, and to draft NEPA/CEQA documents to facilitate future fuels reduction and eventual prescribed fire activities in LVNP wilderness. Three positions will result: a project manager (L. Weissberg, Sierra Institute), and term archaeologist and biologist. An implementation grant will go before the SNC board for approval in June, 2018. If awarded, this grant will fund fuels reduction activities, executed in keeping with the intent and scope of the Wilderness Act by using crosscut saws. The implementation grant will result in an estimated ten weeks of work in 2018, 16 weeks in 2019, and six weeks in 2020. More details to follow with final grant approval.

R. Burnett (Point Blue Conservation Science) asked for project acreage details, as well as opportunities for the group to play a role in outreach and community involvement, especially with the use of fire in LVNP.

S. Buckley indicated that, due to the summer 2018 closure of the Bumpass Hell area, LVNP expects to see more traffic in this western portion of the Park and will be conducting interpretive outreach. The Flatiron ridge unit is 1,600 acres; the Juniper Lake/Inspiration units combined are approximately 2,200. Prescribed burning will be staged over a few years.

N. Kent (Collins Pine) also presented a recently funded project (Onion Ridge Fuel Reduction and Forest Health Improvement Project). The implementation grant was submitted in partnership with the Tehama County Resource Conservation District, and will fund the construction of a 25-mile shaded fuelbreak on a ridge located between Mill and Deer Creeks. Ownership is mixed (Collins Pine and Sierra Pacific Industries, SPI). A portion of this fuelbreak had successfully stopped a previous fire out of Mill Creek on SPI lands. Work will likely begin in 2018. Collins Pine was also awarded a planning grant for their Childs Meadow project, which will work to expand meadow edges and produce water yield benefits. Funds to implement this project were included in the group’s CAL FIRE Climate Change Investments (CCI) Forest Health grant program concept proposal (submitted 02/2018).

J. Kusel (Sierra Institute) offered as a reminder that SNC Prop. 1 grants have to provide watershed benefits; be advanced/supported by diverse interests (collaboratives); and address landscape scale needs. Awards to SLWG members underscore the group’s potential to make a difference on the landscape by bringing resources to the area.

N. Bunch (Plumas National Forest, PNF) added that the Feather River Stewardship Coalition also has multiple SNC Prop. 1 funded projects. They are located south of the SLWG project area around SPI and Soper Wheeler property. These projects include the Grizzly and Wolf projects (on the Beckwourth Ranger District and near Round Valley, respectively). They recently awarded contracts on another project near Bucks Lake. Additional projects are slated for SNC board review in June, including one on the Feather River Ranger District and Butterfly Valley near the town of Quincy.

## Summary of Omnibus Spending Bill Forest Management Reform Impacts

L. Weissberg (Sierra Institute) provided a brief summary of forest management reforms contained within the March, 2018 omnibus spending bill. These include:

- A comprehensive “fire fix,” freezing annual fire suppression appropriations for the USFS and Department of Interior (DOI) at the 2015 10-year average; making disaster funding available through congressional appropriation should the agency’s fire suppression costs exceed their annual allocation; increasing the overall disaster funding cap; noting that this reform does not prevent the practice of fire borrowing should annual costs exceed the allocated budget and available disaster funding.
- A new Categorical Exclusion is established for hazardous fuel reduction activities on 3,000 or fewer acres with the following caveats: projects must be developed by a collaborative, make use of the best available science, increase retention of large and old growth trees, and be located in Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III.
- USFS and DOI are granted authority to enter into 20-year stewardship contracts within Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III and with preference for contractors making innovative use of wood products.
- Road reconstruction, repair, and restoration are now permissible activities under the Good Neighbor Authority.
- Expedited decision making (action/no action analysis) is permitted for fuelbreak planning.

Various USFS employees offered their perspectives on the “fire fix,” commenting that, in theory, this reform will improve funding available for management. The LNF hopes to leverage these funds to assist partners in doing work via tools like Master Stewardship Agreements. This will make use of funds which are available to the agency but may be insufficient to build up their workforce.

A clarification was made that the “fire fix” doesn’t provide more funding for programs, rather provides more money for fire suppression costs that exceed the annual budget. The reform frees trust funds and other monies that are borrowed and should allow the USFS to plan more strategically. Without needing to wait for fire borrowing funding to be freed up late in the fiscal year, the USFS could, for example, let contracts and allocate project funds earlier.

J. Kusel shared that SNC’s Parks, Environment, and Water Bond (Proposition 68) funding (approx. \$30 million) could be available as early as July 1st, assuming passage. In the past, much of these funds have gone to urban areas though they seem to be increasingly allocated to projects that focus on upper watershed health.

## Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The Sierra Institute presented the most recent draft of the group MOU, with edits as suggested by the MOU subcommittee (R. Burnett, C. Felts, M. Mitzel, Charlie Plopper, Aaron Seandel, Sherrie Thrall). Various edits were suggested and/or made. J. Kusel suggested that the group reevaluate, and edit as needed, on a quarterly or biannual basis. Revisions were captured, to be recirculated to the MOU subcommittee and presented at the next meeting.

## Group Structure and Process

J. Kusel suggested the formation of an executive committee with the capacity to make decisions as necessary, for example when the larger group cannot be convened or consulted. J. Kusel suggested that the current strategic planning committee (J. Barrett, S. Buckley, R. Burnett, N. Kent, and Ken Roby) function as an executive committee. It was suggested that the USFS, or their representative, be a non-voting member. The group agreed to the formation of this committee. An alternative structure was offered, wherein 2-3 permanent members could serve on the executive committee, with additional members incorporated as necessary.

With the recognition that the group currently does not have a codified decision-making protocol, the Sierra Institute offered a number of alternatives for consideration and discussion. These include:

- Full consensus
- Unanimity minus one/two, where dissenters must offer an alternative
- Majority vote

J. Kusel recommended avoiding a simple vote to ensure that interests are not overlooked, but also that strict consensus can be limiting. M. Mitzel (Sierra Pacific Industries) offered a structure similar to the Resource Advisory Committees, wherein a cross section of members represents a diversity of interests.

R. Burnett offered that, as part of the collaborative process, not everyone will have their first choice for each project. There could be two modes of agreement: full agreement and alignment where, in the latter case, members acknowledge that the decision is not optimal but amenable. R. Burnett also noted that some organizations may be legally limited in their ability to participate in certain decisions (Federal agencies, for example) though we do want their input. Beyond voting rights, this conversation could help clarify which members can represent SLWG (e.g. in writing letters of support).

J. Kusel suggested that the Sierra Institute work with the executive committee to develop a **decision making protocol proposal to bring back to the group**. C. Felts (Lake Almanor Watershed Group) suggested that this include a default option (e.g. supermajority).

## Strategic Planning Subcommittee Updates

### *Presentation of first meeting outcomes*

R. Burnett and N. Kent presented outcomes of the first strategic planning subcommittee meeting (3/23/2018) to the larger group, beginning with guiding principles/themes, some of which were drawn from the MOU. Desired landscape, process, and social outcomes were reviewed, all of which seek to address the question: what are we trying to achieve? *Note: strategic planning subcommittee notes, including principles and proposed outcomes, can be found on the [SLWG website](#) under “Planning meeting VIII.”*

It was made clear that the USFS was not present at the first strategic planning meeting, though they should be party in the future. S. Buckley clarified that the subcommittee's discussion focused mostly on process, rather than specific acreage or treatments. The subcommittee proposes to have a draft plan available for larger group review by September, 2018.

S. Buckley, R. Burnett, and N. Kent each led a semi-structured small group discussion with SLWG members to gather group members' impressions, feedback, and suggestions. Maps of the current project area boundaries were also presented to group members for feedback.

### *Presentation of small group session discussions*

#### Group 1 Suggestions:

- Increase the specificity of group principles
- Add California Spotted Owl protection as an outcome
- Field trips are a good opportunity to incorporate outside organizations (e.g. The Nature Conservancy)

Though the group agreed that the timeline was aggressive, everyone wanted to see something accomplished soon. Mountain Meadows Conservancy and Trout Unlimited (TU) are very interested in work on Robbers Creek (included in the CCI proposal). The group felt that the CCI project selections were appropriate given their visibility, potential outcomes, and inclusion of private lands where THPs may increase pace. M. Kossow (TU) has previously done work on Mill and Deer Creek and can offer some survey and implementation data to the group. Group members felt the boundaries as presented were appropriate. PG&E and the railroad were identified as missing stakeholders.

#### Group 2 Suggestions:

- More explicit definition of "community well-being"
- Separately identify recreation and economics within guiding principles
- Clarify the third process outcome ("Wildfires of a significant size are managed across jurisdictions") to reflect the group's interest in facilitating cross-jurisdictional projects more broadly
- Suggested outcome: increase the USFS' ability to utilize Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- Include planned projects in area Community Wildfire Protection Plans: this is important in securing funding and accomplishing projects

Local Fire Safe Councils were identified as missing stakeholders. Group priorities should include buy-in from stakeholders and not reinventing the wheel.

#### Group 3 Suggestions:

- Note forest products producers as a "value at-risk" in terms of social outcomes
- Strategic planning effort should address elements beyond forest health (e.g. recreation/trails)
- Maintenance should be an explicit element of strategic planning (e.g. proposed re-entry)

- Proposed strategic planning products: landscape fire modeling, long-term management plan
- SLWG should focus on the roles that non-governmental organizations can play within the group, both as fiduciary agents and connections to the community
- Pay attention to the NEPA/CEQA crosswalk: increase overlap and integration as cross-jurisdictional projects progress
- Improve agreements and capacity for cross-jurisdictional burning
- SLWG should be able to articulate how we fit within the larger collaborative ecosystem (regionally) and be aware of complementary efforts in the area

N. Bunch shared that there is interest in bolstering the state's prescribed fire program and that he has been contacting CAL FIRE Units to determine their approach. It would be beneficial for the surrounding CAL FIRE Units to have agreements with the Forests, outlining their respective responsibilities. The USFS can provide almost all functions other than command and control, this responsibility has to lie with the State because it's their jurisdiction and a planned action.

### California Climate Change Investments Forest Health Grant Program

The Sierra Institute provided a brief presentation of their CCI concept proposal submitted on behalf of the SLWG, including acreage by project and by treatment type. Four projects were included in the proposal, two on USFS lands (West Shore and Robbers Creek in the vicinity of Lake Almanor and Swain Mountain, respectively) and two on Collins Pine lands (Childs Meadow and Rock Creek). Proposed activities include fuels reduction, prescribed fire, meadow restoration, biomass utilization, and a small research component. NEPA surveys on both USFS projects are slated for completion by fall of 2018. If invited, the Sierra Institute will develop a full proposal. J. Kusel added that the Sierra Institute has been exploring options to utilize GNA to implement these projects.

K. Schori (CAL FIRE) notified the group that the CAL FIRE Lassen-Modoc Unit has been drafting a Supplemental Project Agreement (GNSPA), tiered to the state's Good Neighbor Authority master agreement. CAL FIRE needs to meet with the USFS to determine what will go into the GNSPA (i.e. scope of work). J. Kusel requested that the Sierra Institute be involved in this conversation and assume responsibility for keeping the group notified of updates.

C. Espana notified the group that the Almanor Recreation and Park District (ARPD) is planning the proposed Chester Trail, to extend from Chester to Hwy 89 in the vicinity of the West Shore project boundary and several USFS parcels. The ARPD would benefit if the CCI NEPA could be expanded to include those parcels on the West Shore. L. Corral indicated that R. Nickerson (Almanor DR) sent an email with survey needs for the summer, including the Chester Trail. T. McArthur indicated that NEPA for the trail would be less intensive than analysis required for the CCI project and could be completed separately.

R. Burnett suggested that, if chosen to submit a full proposal, the group should consider how they might function to help expedite projects, e.g. scoping.

## Closing Remarks

It was agreed the field tour discussion be tabled until the next meeting. The Sierra Institute will confirm that a recurring date and time are amenable to the group (first Thursday, every other month from 1:00 - 4:00p). An announcement was made regarding the upcoming Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement meeting (Sacramento, May 7-8), with SLWG members encouraged to attend. Sierra Institute will circulate a draft agenda once finalized.

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