



South Lassen Watersheds Strategic Planning Meeting VII
 Wednesday, January 24th; Almanor Ranger District Conference Center, 10:00 - 13:30

Meeting Synopsis

The South Lassen Watersheds Group met in Chester, CA to discuss recently awarded grant funding, proposed activities to formalize group process and priorities, and upcoming grant opportunities to be pursued by the Sierra Institute and other group members. Aaron Seandel of the Lake Almanor Watershed Group provided an update on the group’s annual monitoring and report.

Attendees

Janie Ackley	Lassen NF	Ron Lunder	Mtn. Meadows Conservancy
Jon Barrett	Tehama County RCD	Tom McCubbins	Tehama County RCD
Steve Buckley	Lassen Volcanic NP	Mike Mitzel	Sierra Pacific Industries
Ryan Burnett	Point Blue Conservation Science	Russell Nickerson	Lassen NF
Laura Corral	Lassen NF	Charlie Plopper	Lake Almanor Watershed Group/Mtn. Meadows Conservancy
Carl Felts	Upper Feather R. Integrated Regional Water Mgmt. Program	John Quidachay	Associated CA Loggers/Upper Mokelumne R. Watershed Authority
Lorena Gorbet	Maidu Summit Consortium	Rob Rianda	Tehama County RCD
Less Hall	Maidu Summit Consortium	Ken Roby	Feather R. Trout Unlimited
Judd Hanna	Mill Creek Conservancy	Scott Roskowisch	CAL FIRE
Hannah Hepner	Feather R. Stewardship Coalition	Aaron Seandel	Lake Almanor Watershed Group
Bennie Johnson	Collins Pine	Mark Shaffer	Honey Lake Power
Nick Kent	Collins Pine	Sherrie Thrall	Plumas Board of Supervisors

Action Items

- Sierra Institute to establish agenda, MOU, and strategic plan subcommittees
 - Include project updates as a standing agenda item
- Sierra Institute to establish a regular meeting day and location via Doodle poll
- Suggested: field trip to Goodrich Springs with area stakeholders

Meeting Opening

Previous meeting notes were accepted. J. Kusel suggested the creation of an agenda subcommittee. The subcommittee will review proposed agendas (prepared by the Sierra Institute) via a short phone call prior to the meeting. *C. Felts, N. Kent, C. Plopper, and S. Buckley* volunteered to serve on the agenda subcommittee.

PG&E Resilient Communities Grant Update/Stakeholder Analysis

J. Kusel informed the group that the Sierra Institute received funding for a proposal to the PG&E Better Together Resilient Communities grant program, developed in conversation with the group. The funding will be used, in part, to support facilitation of SLWG. Additional duties include development of further grant funding opportunities as well as activities outlined in the proposed schedule for 2018 (presented to the group). The Sierra Institute hopes these activities will help the group run smoothly and operate efficiently over time.

The stakeholder analysis will incorporate priorities from all stakeholder groups and attempt to identify common ground. SI has previous experience performing stakeholder analyses for forest collaboratives as well as ABWAC. The strategic plan will help projects come to fruition and establish longevity and will, ideally, incorporate many of the issues and concerns ascertained via the stakeholder analysis. It was recommended that group members read the Earth Works report.

R. Burnett pointed out that the SLWG has already begun developing projects and that the group should be mindful of how ongoing grant funding applications are integrated into the process currently being developed. J. Kusel acknowledged that the group will simultaneously pursue projects and formalize group processes and priorities.

It was suggested that project updates become a standing agenda item.

Mission Statement/MOU

A discussion regarding the draft mission statement and MOU were facilitated by displaying current language. J. Kusel indicated that a subcommittee could be established, if desired, to facilitate this process and that a signed MOU has utility in the context of grant applications.

Members expressed interest in including more language related to: watershed function and restoration; addressing water quality issues in local water bodies; tourism and recreation; local economies; wildlife habitat; cultural values; landscape conservation; long-term visioning (i.e. conditions in 50 years); outreach and education; and specifics regarding the pursuit of funding. Structural recommendations include: shortening the mission statement and increasing clarity in other sections (e.g. vision statement, goals).

R. Burnett proposed the following statement: “SLWG will work collaboratively to advance the ecological resilience of the Upper North Fork/Upper Mill/Upper Deer Creek Watersheds” and suggested that the mission statement be succinct and easy to memorize.

J. Kusel asked for objections/edits to the “norms of behavior” section, none were voiced. **S. Thrall, A. Seandel, R. Burnett, C. Plopper, C. Felts and M. Mitzel volunteered to serve on an MOU subcommittee.** J. Kusel recommended that subcommittees meet (in phone or in person) in the months between SLWG meetings to increase larger group productivity. Sierra Institute staff can reserve time to assist with this.

Sierra Institute will aim to schedule meetings on the same day and in the same location going forward. Sierra Institute staff will circulate a Doodle poll to determine the best day of the week for everyone. Standing conflicts are Tuesdays and the second Wednesday of the month.

Lake Almanor Watershed Group (LAWG)/Water Quality Update

A. Seandel provided an update on activities of the LAWG, including the most recent annual monitoring effort. Issues of concern include: increases in phytoplankton, algal blooms, and nutrient concentrations, all of which degrade fish habitat. LAWG wants to advance projects that identify areas of the lake most sensitive to pollution, mitigate inflow, and address pollution abatement. LAWG is also interested in research gleaned from similar cases elsewhere. The 2017 report is being prepared and will be available by the next SLWG meeting. Anyone interested in seeing the report can visit the Sierra Institute [website](#) or email L. Weissberg.

A discussion was had regarding the possible outcomes of 2105 dam licensing and potential impacts on the Lake Almanor, Mountain Meadows, and Butt Lake fisheries (and human communities) if excessive amounts of cold water are released. An EIR was supposed to be released in January, though group members expect a final EIR in May 2018.

R. Lunder pointed out that shunting warm water - with high algal blooms - to Lake Almanor from Mountain Meadows Reservoir likely has a much larger impact on Lake Almanor water quality than area landowners. Historical temperature data may be revealing, though the most recent data is from 2004.

R. Burnett mentioned that there is high turbidity out of Hamilton Branch, especially during spring and winter storms. The source is unknown but the plume probably contributes much of the nutrient concentrations. Identifying where these sediments are coming from should be a high priority. A. Seandel noted that the plume may also be contributing to metal concentrations.

NEPA Procedures Revision Process

L. Weissberg provided a brief overview of NEPA procedural revisions and the comment process. The Sierra Institute has prepared a comment based upon conversations at the Fall 2017 SCALE meeting. Individuals/organizations can sign on as desired. The Sierra Institute would like to see NEPA expedited in ways that do not compromise environmental objectives.

Grant Funding Opportunities

CAL FIRE Climate Change Investments (CCI) Program

The Sierra Institute will be submitting a grant proposal to the CAL FIRE CCI grant program (deadline February 21, project selection *expected* June-July 2018). The current understanding is that there will be \$100 million this year and again next year. Sales of carbon credits in CA are strong and this program is expected to continue to receive funding in the coming years. The SLWG landscape has been identified as a high priority both by CAL FIRE and USFS. Among other criteria, CAL FIRE is seeking to fund projects with collaborative support. R. Burnett mentioned that CDFW also provides CCI grant dollars with an upcoming announcement.

The Sierra Institute presented the following three projects at the LNF FLT meeting in January (West Shore Lake Almanor, Childs Meadow, and Mini Aspen) and were well-received. Anticipated challenges in applying for CCI funding include: projects are not NEPA-ready and *implementation* must be completed by March 30, 2022; communicating how these projects fit within a strategic vision or overall approach to the landscape.

Project leads shared information about the projects to be included in this year's proposal.

West Shore Lake Almanor, Mini Aspen (R. Nickerson)

Some of the survey work and pre-planning had been done before efforts were refocused toward the Storrie fire. Project boundaries have been expanded to abut private land and to include the PNF boat launch administered by the LNF (for a total ~2500 acres). Treatments include thinning to improve structure and habitat, and potentially follow-up underburning.

Mini Aspen has been brought to the group previously. This project will include thinning in aspen stands and meadow restoration in cooperation with partners. A proposal is currently being drafted. Much of the survey work had begun, some of it is complete. Almanor RD staff have been tasked with completing survey work on both projects.

Childs Meadow (N. Kent)

Collins Pine staff and TCRCDD developed an SNC Prop. 1 grant for planning (not yet awarded). The project would restore meadow edges and ties in with pre-existing TNC/Point Blue work including willow flycatcher habitat and beaver dam analogues. R. Burnett indicated that Point Blue will also develop an educational component with the school district to do restoration work.

Treatments include thinning, lodgepole pine removal, fuels reduction along Hwy 36, and selective harvesting. Collins Pine has been working with the RCD and is considering removing bridges and fencing off fens in the southern area of the project. It would be beneficial to coordinate with USFS treatments along Hwy 36 (not yet planned). Collins Pine would be including this project in the CCI proposal for implementation dollars. This is a heavily traveled corridor and there is high potential for fire ignition.

General Comments/Questions re: CCI

J. Kusel acknowledged that these projects have not been extensively deliberated by the group but have been selected and advanced for various reasons. R. Burnett noted that these are relatively easy projects with pre-existing momentum. These can be pilots to test the ability of SLWG to work together, with the added benefit that they represent a diversity of interests/approaches. There has also been momentum for meadow restoration on Rock Creek, including fuels reduction. The SLWG should consider including this in the larger proposal. N. Kent added that these projects are all highly visible.

L. Gorbet noted that the MSC will be deeded 168 acres of timberland within the expanded West Shore Lake Almanor project boundaries. They would like to remove ladder fuels and retain larger trees as seed trees. They won't be deeded the land for another 5-6 months but they would like to see the acreage included in the project if possible.

R. Lunder shared that the MMC has proposed expanding Mini Aspen project boundaries to the Eagle Lake district to protect springs from cattle grazing. There may also be a possibility to include PG&E to reduce powerline hazard. Beatty and Associates also own land in that corridor. R. Lunder also mentioned the Goodrich Springs protection program, which was presented to the leadership team. These are the headwaters of the North Fork with serious cattle grazing issues. J. Kusel asked if this might be appropriate for a NFWF application. R. Burnett noted that, while the group is interested in cross-jurisdictional work (separate RD), we should consider whether we want to try to tackle this in the first series of projects. **SLWG could have a group field trip to look around with area stakeholders.**

S. Buckley brought up WUI (100,000 acres in the region) and reminded the group to consider their involvement in large grant proposals given public support for this aspect of fuels reduction. This may be a component of a proposal to be submitted next year. J. Kusel reminded the group that we don't want to include more in the proposal than can reasonably be completed.

L. Corral asked for clarification regarding project "completion," i.e. does this mean service contracts are written up or that logging is completed? **Note: follow-up conversation with USFS R5 staff clarifies that "completion" indicates that money has been spent, not just allocated.**

N. Kent also provided an update on the Onion Ridge fuel reduction, which is not to be included in the CCI proposal. Collins Pine received an implementation grant for this 25-mile shaded fuel break on a road formerly used as a fire anchor. Much of the work is in-kind but requested funding will assist with mastication and biomass thinning. Much of the surrounding USFS acreage has been burned (Onion & Cub fires) and could be reforested. R. Nickerson indicated that complementary work is on the RD's radar but is a lower priority than the Storrie fire.

Master Stewardship Agreements (MSA) & Good Neighbor Authority (GNA)

J. Quidachay (Associated CA Loggers, Upper Mokelumne R. Watershed Authority) indicated that there hasn't been much success with GNA in CA, primarily because CAL FIRE has limited forestry capacity. States where GNA is working well (e.g. Idaho) have bureaus or departments dedicated to the authority's use. J. Kusel mentioned that Sierra Institute and others are exploring ways to use GNA with CCI funding to reinvest on the landscape through retained receipts.

N. Kent mentioned that D. Gordon (CAL FIRE) had been working to establish a Good Neighbor Supplemental Project Agreement (GNSPA) with the LNF (under the CA Master Agreement). Current status of the GNSPA is unknown. Units need assistance from Sacramento to implement.

On the topic of increasing efficiency of CCI dollars by utilizing collaborative tools and authorities: J. Quidachay indicated that the D.C. office (USFS) has been pushing MSAs to increase pace and scale. UMRWA established an MSA with a number of water agencies (including EBMUD). They are in the second phase of implementation and have let contracts for masticating, piling, etc. and will now be removing material. Other activities included in the MSA/SPAs include engineering work and timber sales on a large, landscape-level project. J. Quidachay also noted that Mule Deer Foundation and Wildlife Turkey Federation have regional MSAs (R5) that could expedite implementation.

R. Burnett asked if MSAs allow for planning, as there is a need for money for Mini meadow restoration planning. Collins Pine could, for example, receive the timber for Mini if they provide the money up front for planning. J. Quidachay indicated that some MSAs do not allow for planning but any entity can enter into a new MSA. J. Quidachay also recommended Kevin Zeman (Stewardship Agreements Specialist, USFS) as a resource on MSAs.

J. Kusel also indicated regional support for third-party NEPA teams, which will help ensure that implementation is not held up by environmental analysis. NEPA teams could also yield positive benefits for rural economic development.

N. Kent shared that Steve Brink (CA Forestry Association) stresses private land inclusion; WUI; biomass utilization; large landscapes; and modest amounts of funding to GHG reduction research as priorities for CCI funding. Collins Pine's Rock Creek project is in partnership with Plumas Corporation and only private land is included. Chris Surfleet (Cal Poly) has committed to perform hydrological monitoring/research but needs funding.

J. Kusel asked if there were any serious objections to the proposed projects. M. Mitzel offered that SLWG should prioritize projects which can be expedited to demonstrate a success from the group. He warned that the group should be cautious about the amount of projects it commits to, keeping in mind that it is a volunteer effort. This notion was seconded by J. Quidachay. R. Burnett suggested that budgets and real potential for GHG reductions could be worthy criteria for evaluating which projects are included. M. Shaffer reminded the group of the implementation deadline (2022), advocating to balance concerns regarding capacity against time limits imposed by grant requirements.

N. Kent asked about the feasibility of utilizing CEs for Mini Aspen and Almanor West. J. Quidachay reminded the group that the Resilient Federal Forests Act - if passed - could increase the allowable acreage for CEs. R. Nickerson agreed that a CE would be the best and quickest option but is not sure if this is an option for these particular projects.

Update: SNC Prop. 1 Grant, Lassen Volcanic National Park (S. Buckley)

S. Buckley gave an overview of an LVNP/Sierra Institute grant proposal currently in to SNC to perform fuels reduction on 1,600 acres on Flatiron ridge (headwaters of the North Fork Feather R.). The most recent fire entry was in the 1990's (900 acres). LVNP is trying to pioneer ways to deal with fuels reduction in wilderness areas requiring compliance with the Wilderness Act. This will necessitate large crews and repeated entry. They would also like to complete NEPA to facilitate another burn on Juniper Lake (two units: East Juniper Lake, Inspiration). Inspiration is a Wilderness Area. NPS wants to do archaeology on the entire watershed to expedite environmental analysis for this and future projects.

This project represents a shift from suppression to the less impactful practice of repeated, low-intensity fire entry. The idea is to manage for resource benefit if there is another start. This gives NPS a way to start addressing fuel loadings in those areas where they are unable to thin their way out of it. They hope to work backwards out of the valley toward Warner Valley WUI and other

high concern areas. The Sierra Institute will hire a coordinator who will liaise with this group and manage the grant. J. Kusel clarified that the grant is for both implementation and planning.

Closing Remarks

K. Roby expressed concern about the strategic plan, indicating that we don't need a year to complete. A subcommittee was established to present an outline and revised timeline at the next meeting. *K. Roby, S. Buckley, N. Kent, J. Barrett, and R. Burnett* volunteered.