

South Lassen Watersheds Strategic Planning Meeting IV

Tuesday, September 26th; Almanor Ranger District Offices; 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Meeting Synopsis

Over twenty participants met in Chester, CA for the fourth strategic planning meeting of the South Lassen Watersheds Group. Members discussed multiple grant proposals for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 1 Grant Program. CAL FIRE representatives provided a first look at upcoming funding opportunities from the state. Almanor Ranger District staff introduced a potential collaborative project to enhance aspen stands along a major travel corridor near Westwood, CA.

Attendees

Janie Ackley	Lassen NF	Ron Lunder	Mtn. Meadows Conservancy
Steve Buckley	Lassen Volcanic NP	Dan Martynn	NRCS
Nicholas Bunch	Plumas NF	Tom McCubbins	Tehama County RCD
Ryan Burnett	Point Blue Conservation Science	Mike Mitzel	Sierra Pacific Industries
Coye Burnett	Lassen NF	Charlie Plopper	Lake Almanor Watershed Group
Matt Cerney	Lassen NF	Rob Rianda	Tehama County RCD
Laura Corral	Lassen NF	Ken Roby	Aquatic Ecologist
Carlos Espana	Almanor Recreation & Park District	Scott Rosikiewicz	CAL FIRE
Lorena Gorbet	Maidu Summit Consortium	Aaron Seandel	Lake Almanor Watershed Group
Maurice Huynh	Plumas NF	Erick Stemmerman	Lassen NF
Bennie Johnson	Mountain Meadows Conservancy		

Action Items

- **Sierra Institute** to schedule a meeting for early November, 2017. **DONE**
- **Sierra Institute** to circulate information regarding the upcoming Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement workshop. **DONE**

Meeting Notes

Introductions

- J. Kusel recounted a brief history of the South Lassen Watersheds Group, including the influence of the Upper Feather River Integrated Regional Watershed Management (IRWM) in developing initial prioritization principles for the group.

- The SLWG focus area is approximated at this point, but the group is supportive of a large-scale watershed or “fireshed” approach in the Upper Feather River, Upper Mill and Deer Creeks region.

Previous Meeting Outcomes

- The SLWG met previously on September 26th and discussed identifying project boundaries and opportunities to link management activities. The USFS agreed to acquire relevant maps to inform future meetings, as well as preparing information regarding the program of work for both Lassen and Plumas National Forests.

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grants

- S. Buckley introduced two grant proposals that Lassen Volcanic National Park (LVNP) and the Sierra Institute are submitting to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Proposition 1 Grant Program. The National Parks Service (NPS) has not done many projects with SNC and it is a good opportunity to advance that relationship.
- The first proposal is considered Category One: Site Improvement. The project area is in the headwaters of the North Fork Feather River. The “Flatiron” unit in this area is approximately 1,600 acres. It has had multiple entries over the last two decades, but there has been significant fire suppression and the area is in need of treatment.
- Treating, and eventually burning, the Flatiron Unit will serve as a good anchor for continued fire management operations in LVNP. Fire is one of the main tools available to the NPS in wilderness areas such as the headwaters.
- There is a second phase to the project under Category Two: Planning. This phase involves surveys along wilderness trails to set the stage for future implementation efforts.
- What is the timeline for the prescribed burning component?
 - There is at least a three-year window and possibly 4 years. Funding decisions are anticipated in March, 2018.
- R. Burnett added that this would be a good opportunity to do some outreach and education on the benefits of the project and prescribed burning. It is a chance to address the common aversion to smoke exhibited by residents.
- The Sierra Institute will have a half-time coordinator position funded should SNC approve the project. J. Kusel noted the group’s support of a coordinator to address the broad strategy and direction of the SLWG.

- D. Martynn inquired about the private landowners in the project area. Have they been receptive to the proposal?
 - S. Buckley mentioned that tribes have been engaged. Beyond that, there is a public involvement component through the LVNP Fire Plan. The plan is an environmental assessment, and the development will include landowners and other stakeholders.
- Group members noted the vulnerability of Warner Valley. This area is considered part of the wildland-urban interface (WUI). It would be prudent for SLWG to begin discussing ways to address the protection of this area. **Future Meeting Topic**
- N. Kent described the SNC grant proposals that Collins Pine, in partnership with Tehama County Resource Conservation District (RCD), are submitting for the Proposition 1 Grant Program.
 - The first proposal is a planning grant to develop a Timber Harvest Plan (THP) for Child's Meadows.
 - Collins/Tehama are also submitting an implementation grant for a fuelbreak on Onion Ridge. This ridge is between Mill and Deer Creeks and runs all the way up to the Ishi Wilderness.

Potential Projects, Mapping

- E. Stemmerman announced that the Almanor West "pilot project" has been delayed due to surveys. The USFS determined that the surveys would not be completed until 2018/19. That said, there is still significant interest in treating the West Shore.
- Another potential project, titled "Mini Aspen" was introduced to group members. The project is located along A21 (Mooney Rd, north out of Westwood, CA).
- The project includes mitigating the loss of aspen stands. Conifer encroachment is contributing to the decline of aspen.
- N. Kent discussed some of the attractive components of the Mini Aspen project.
 - Working in this area would contribute significantly to fire resilience and act as a fuelbreak. It is a dense forest along a main travel corridor. Robbers Creek runs through the area a well, which ultimately feeds into Mountain Meadows Reservoir.
- What is the NEPA vehicle for this project?
 - It is under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). It might fall under a categorical exclusion (CE); if not, it would hopefully be a pretty simple EA.
- J. Kusel asked if there were concerns from group members in moving Mini Aspen forward?

- K. Roby supported the project, but emphasized the need to transition into more strategic planning.
- The group agreed that there is a balance between implementing projects and developing a strategic plan for the region.
 - E. Stemmerman mentioned the opportunity to utilize Storrie Fire funds for strategic planning. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) will begin to administer funds and keep them available to use on the district.
- R. Burnett asked if the NFWF funding was limited to the Storrie Fire footprint.
 - They are bound to use of settlement funds in the same way the USFS is. However, it is possible to use the funds outside of the footprint if you can demonstrate a nexus between the work and benefits to the burned area.
 - M. Huynh noted that the same strategy has been successful on the Plumas NF.
- M. Huynh discussed activities on the Plumas National Forest.
- Much of the recent activity has been centered around the Minerva Fire. Typically, fire salvage leads to delays in other projects.
- The PNF program of work includes a project near Belden, CA called “Boat Launch”. Surveys are underway and the project is ready for scoping. It will most likely fall under an insect/disease CE (HFRA CE).
- There is another significant project including the Middle Fork Feather River. The Mt. Hough District is planning to take on the majority of activities. The EA will be fairly complex.
- M. Huynh mentioned staffing issues on PNF, which is consistent with most districts in the region.

Funding Opportunities

- Don Gordon, CAL FIRE Lassen-Modoc Unit Chief, introduced new agency funding opportunities.
- \$200 million has been augmented for a Cap and Trade grant program under CAL FIRE. Additional money has been dedicated to public education, urban forestry, and defensive space inspections. CAL FIRE has four years to administer these funds.
- State Responsibility Area (SRA) fees have been suspended for ten years, with the possibility of being eliminated. Cap and Trade funding allows for more flexibility than SRA and is not restricted to certain areas.

- There are no definitive guidelines for the Cap and Trade grant program at this point.
- D. Gordon talked about the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA). GNA is a mechanism enabling national forests to enter into agreements with state agencies to implement activities on federal lands using state, federal, or private funding.
- USFS Region 5 and CAL FIRE are optimistic about GNA. Leadership is particularly interested in seeing an agreement in place in the Northern Sierra.
- GNA can potentially allow for external crews to supplement USFS staff. D. Gordon is supportive of this strategy. Another mechanism, the Wyden Amendment, enables federal crews to work on private or state lands.
- The mixed ownership area south of Lassen Volcanic National Park would be a good location to utilize GNA and Wyden and work across boundaries.
- N. Bunch said USFS Region 5 is supportive of prescribed burns across boundaries into private land. However, the USFS does not retain authority over those areas.
 - J. Kusel noted that private landowners are less willing to embrace prescribed burning because of the liability.
- K. Roby asked if the GNA agreements can be implemented on an ongoing basis.
 - Yes. GNA agreements can be amended to suit projects as they are developed.

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.