



South Lassen Watersheds Strategic Planning Meeting III
 Tuesday, August 7th, 2018; Collins Pine Boardroom, 13:45 - 16:15

Meeting Synopsis

The South Lassen Watersheds Group’s strategic planning subcommittee and select SLWG members met to discuss central elements of the strategic plan, refine project selection criteria, and achieve consensus on the use of recently awarded grant funds.

Attendees

Jon Barrett	Resource Conservation District of Tehama County	Nick Kent	Collins Pine
Steve Buckley	Lassen Volcanic National Park	Jason Mateljak	Lassen Volcanic National Park
Ryan Burnett	Point Blue Conservation Science	Russell Nickerson	Lassen National Forest
Lorena Gorbet	Maidu Summit Consortium	Alisha Wilson	Maidu Summit Consortium

Action Items

- Facilitate group discussion regarding SLWG boundary (*Sierra Institute*)
- Work with MSC to define TEK principles (*Sierra Institute*)
- Revisit project scoring matrix with the larger group (*Sierra Institute*)

I Strategic Plan Presentations

Forest health/wildfire risk (N. Kent)

Major regional issues related to forest health and wildfire risk are increased stand densities, increased proportion of white fir compared with fire-tolerant pine species, and decreased presence of large trees, all of which contribute to tree mortality and increases in fire severity.

Appropriate treatments include: strategic fuelbreaks on major ridges; forest thinning, especially targeting the removal of overstocked white fir; and prescribed fire. Areas should be evaluated based on stand density index (SDI), prioritizing entry for those with SDI ≥ 60% (consult Danny Cluck’s prioritization maps). The group should consider whether conditions projected under future climate change might justify thinning before SDI reaches 60%.

Treatments should reduce SDI to 40% and increase pine dominance to improve fire resilience. Aspen stand improvement should be incorporated into thinning projects. Large-scale, high-severity fires are resulting in broad swaths of shrubland on the landscape, rather than mosaics. These brushfields, with high fuel loading, pose a continued fire risk. Private landowners utilize

herbicides in post-fire landscape to facilitate initial tree release (reforestation), resulting in many more trees per acre on recently burned private lands when compared with Federal lands.

Specific areas of interest include: WUI around Lake Almanor and fuelbreaks/thinning projects adjacent to the West Shore projects; proposed fuelbreaks on ridgetops in the vicinity of the Chips fire footprint; fuelbreaks on Moonlight Ridge and on roads leading to Dyer Mountain. Other priority areas with work in progress include: Feather River Drive north from Chester toward Warner Valley (SPI), and Onion Ridge (Collins Pine/SPI). A fireshed analysis would quantitatively ID priority areas on the landscape.

Watershed health (S. Buckley)

A major threat to watershed health is large scale, high severity fire. However, a strategy that aims to avoid high severity fire could lead to a full suppression regime. Mixed severity fire regimes are ecologically beneficial and realistic for our regional forests. The group should better understand high severity fire, its role in our ecosystems, and where it is appropriate.

Priority project areas are those with a confluence of interests and where projects do not negatively impact reservoirs and SWP infrastructure. The group could identify aquatic refugia, fish passage barriers, and other important landscape features related to aquatic habitat, and work outward from these. The group might ID small categorical exclusion opportunities and pursue additional work from there.

Considerations include the disposal of materials generated via watershed health projects and the state of centralized infrastructure in the region. Improved infrastructure could allow for funding mechanisms that subsidize tree removal from residential properties as preventative work.

Habitat and biodiversity (R. Burnett)

SLWG projects should employ strategic thinning and wildland fire use to improve high priority habitat, water resources, and communities. Proposed projects include meadow restoration in Yellow Creek and Robbers Creek (both LNF). Robbers Creek engages multiple partners and provides multiple benefits. This is a priority area for habitat and biodiversity, will test a shared stewardship approach, and will implement close to SLWG communities. Joint fire planning is also included in the LNF's new Forest Plan, targeting the Silver Lake area.

One consideration is plant materials infrastructure, which can help guard against permanent type-conversion and facilitate adaptive restoration and assisted migration as a response to climate change. Community benefits, in the form of job creation, would result as well. Collaborative weed management should be incorporated into thinning projects.

Communities (J. Kusel)

The Sierra Institute has been working, via the Integrated Regional Water Management program, to delineate communities within and around the SLWG boundary and characterize community capacity. The community of Mineral is excluded from the current boundary. **Members suggest**

extending the SLWG boundary to the western edge of the Almanor RD boundary to address this issue. SI will bring an alternate version of the SLWG boundary to a larger group meeting to facilitate a boundary conversation.

Carbon Sequestration (L. Weissberg)

Various categories of projects have the potential to increase carbon storage and sequestration on the landscape, though we may have insufficient information to prioritize on this basis. The group should think strategically about how this element/priority will be addressed in project planning and evaluation. SLWG could develop and standardize pre- and post-project monitoring protocol to better characterize carbon benefits, the results of which may be of interest to funding entities like CAL FIRE. Assumptions around carbon benefits, as with other subject areas, should be acknowledged within the strategic plan. We can endeavor to test these assumptions and build an adaptive management plan around these elements.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (L. Gorbet)

TEK utilizes thousands of years of practice to manage landscapes to achieve many of the same ends discussed thus far. TEK is not restricted to the use of fire, though it is one of the suite of tools. Results are open, multi-aged, multi-species forests. Including TEK in project planning necessitates the inclusion of humans on the landscape to do the work, making it costlier than other approaches. Scale is a critical consideration: how much acreage can be treated in this way?

Three potential approaches were identified for increasing the use of TEK in SLWG projects: TEK informs project design; TEK is a design component; TEK projects are implemented at an appropriate scale, or as maintenance treatments. The group should work with MSC to clearly define TEK (i.e., what are the principles and how can we incorporate them with scientific approaches)? The group should also consider monitoring and documentation of TEK projects (i.e., do these projects lead to different outcomes?). One means of moving forward is to identify areas that are of import to the Maidu, which may be outside of our publicly managed lands.

II Project Selection Criteria

LNF employs a 12-point project prioritization scale using the following factors:

1. Regional office/WO target
2. Funding source is time sensitive
3. Legal obligation
4. Partnerships/collaboration/MSA
5. Special authorities
6. Leveraging existing treatments
7. Political and social (pressures)
8. WUI
9. Insect and disease
10. Low complexity
11. Biomass

12. Priority watershed

Scoring is additive with options: Yes (1); Maybe (0.5); No (0).

SI's draft scoring matrix was discussed and minor edits were made. The following elements were proposed for inclusion: complexity of compliance; availability of funding sources; state of planning/availability of data; and community pressure. Scoring and weighting is to be determined. **The matrix will be revisited with the larger group.**

III Funding Updates

The Sierra Institute was awarded \$3 million from Cal Fire's California Climate Investments Forest Health Grant Program, contingent upon resubmission of an adjusted budget and scope of work. Four options were presented to the strategic planning committee for discussion, including landscape-scale NEPA for a strategic portion of the SLWG footprint.

The option chosen, by group consensus, was one that will produce NEPA/CEQA for the West Shore and Robbers Creek projects, and implement private lands treatments both on CAF and within the West Shore project area. This option will balance group desires to implement projects and contribute to a shovel-ready portfolio. A developing GNSPA between CAL FIRE's LMU and the LNF will still be employed to complete CEQA requirements.

Regarding landscape-scale NEPA: Plumas-Lassen Administrative Study (2000) may be a good case study (45,000 acres). The strategic plan may help establish which of the 600,000+ acres would be best to analyze via this type of effort in the future. A recently awarded BOR grant (\$99,669) to fund landscape-scale analysis will soon be available to support this work.