



South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting  
Chester Fire Department, 251 Chester Airport Road, Chester, CA  
11 April 2019 1 pm - 4 pm

Meeting Synopsis

The South Lassen Watersheds Group (SLWG) met in Chester, CA to discuss the group’s planning boundary, revisit the MOU signed by Sierra Pacific Industries, and report out on grant and subcommittee updates.

Attendees

Steve Buckley	Lassen Volcanic National Park (LAVO)	Charlie Plopper	Lake Almanor Watershed Group (LAWG)
Ryan Burnett	Point Blue Conservation Science	Erick Puckett	CAL FIRE TGU
Ben Cunningham	Maidu Summit Consortium (MSC)	Trish Puterbaugh	Lassen Forest Preservation Group
Steve DeBonis	Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI)	Jim Richardson	LAVO
Rhianna Dutra	Collins Pine (CP)	Kyle Rodgers	Sierra Institute
Lorena Gorbet	MSC	Hilary Sanders	Sierra Institute
Bennie Johnson	CP	Aaron Seandel	LAWG
Ivy Kostick	Sierra Institute	Sherrie Thrall	Plumas County Board of Supervisors
Jonathan Kusel	Sierra Institute	Carl Felts	LAWG
Ron Lunder	Mountain Meadows Conservancy	Laura Corral	LNF
Zeke Lunder	Deer Creek Resources	Scott Henry	CAL FIRE
Mike Mitzel	SPI	Matt Cerney	LNF
Dan Martynn	Natural Resources Conservation Service	Alisha Wilson	MSC
Russel Nickerson	Lassen National Forest (LNF)		

Actions Items

- Aaron Seandel: Lake Almanor Water Quality Sampling Program
- Jonathan Kusel: Sierra Institute will document and share lessons.
- Lassen National Forest: Anyone is welcome to join the Basic 32 for firefighting
- Mike Mitzel: Grant implemented by certain date but we need a timeline and workplan.

Meeting Opening

Apologies were made for the period of transition; there is exciting about getting up to speed with regards to the trajectory of the group. The group is not asked to approve last meeting’s notes but the notes will be sent out at a later date.

Boundary discussion

A presentation and review of the boundary discussion shows that what was previously 600,000 acres may now approach 700,000. Mentions were made of the additional Almanor Ranger District area (green), the portion of the Tehama County Resource Conservation District Community Wildlife Plan Covering Mineral (orange/red), and the Collins Pine Wolf Creek block (blue). A comment was made in favor of adding the Collins Pine Wolf Creek area and a comment was made about the possible challenges related to not including the Almanor Ranger



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District. Burney-Hat Creek has had discussions for why not to include the Hat Creek Ranger District, but it was mentioned that this would be a potential way to capture an administrative unit that can facilitate work. It was mentioned that the DOC Watershed Coordinator grants application included remarks about lining up the Butte Resource Conservation District Boundary to allow for coverage and connectivity; it also suggested slight modification to the southern boundary. Steve DeBonis shared that Mineral CWPP abuts SPI land and upper headwaters of battle creek. It's the furthest point from Almanor district, adjacent to the Hat Creek district.

It was pointed out land in newly included areas over have different characteristics and issues from other areas within the boundary and may not be an organic addition. A participant suggests the group may not want to be responsible for fire in that area, but another participant reasoned that the group is "on the hook" regardless. Participants agreed expanding the boundary into different terrain with different issues is a consideration and that if inclusion makes administrative sense, it doesn't benefit anyone to orphan the area. Another participant commented that the group should want to support an area rather than exclude it out of fear. Inclusion appears to be justified from an administrative standpoint; but more analysis is being done which may help prioritize new inclusions. A member of the group moved to include proposed additions; the motion was seconded and unanimously approved. Jonathan Kusel and Sierra Institute is tasked with coming up with the acreage of the new inclusions.

### [Sierra Pacific Industries](#)

The group revisited the MOU signed with CAL Fire, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and National Fish and Wildlife Federation (NFWF) in August 2017. It represents a strategic framework to restore and protect areas inhabited by California Spotted Owl (CSO), a Species of Special Concern according to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Mike Mitzel relayed that a MOU was signed in August 2017 with CALFIRE USFS, and FWS with regards to fuel breaks and other projects related to sharing data on wildlife, archaeological sites, and watershed scoping. A number of projects have been prioritized in each NF since signing the MOU, particularly on SPI land and they are waiting for FS to jump on board. M. Mitzel also shared that they've signed additional amendments to the MOU to work out similar strategies with private landowners (Collins and Beatty). They are attempting to get all fuel reduction ideas mapped, including spotted owl habitat. The fuel break near Paradise Lake stopped the Camp Fire, protecting homes on the other side, and showcased its effectiveness. The Board of Forestry is holding a tour of the fuel break that is open to the public. *Steve asked about the characteristics of fuel breaks.* Mike Mitzel responded that it varies, and that there are fuel breaks where agencies can take advantage and get equipment in. He stated that the FS has quite a road network and that even if you can't get out and do bigger projects, getting the road daylighted can reduce damages even if it doesn't spot a large advancing fire. *Trish Puterbaugh asked about fuel breaks on Hwy 32.* Mike Mitzel answered that they were, working with CALTRANS on Hwy 44 and helping to finish by mid-December of this year. *Map is passed around.*

### [SLWG Grant Updates](#)

CCI

The Sierra Institute and partners have been working on planning and implementation of the groups' three million-dollar CCI grant award. group is informed that three million was received to carry out a composite of different projects including Robbers Creek (Mini), Rock Creek and Childs Meadow on Collins Pine land. The Childs Meadow and Rock Creek projects are both restoration heavy with some fuels reduction components. Institute is supporting implementation on 40 acres of non-industrial private land (Collins Pine), helping at the West Shore location on Forest Service, and helping with on the ground implementation with field crews for stand exams and markings. Ivy Kostick shared that Sierra Institute is helping at West Shore and with implementation on Collins Pine Land. It's about 40 acres of non-industrialized private land. She added that they'll have field crews for stand exams and marking. More details regarding the projects include CCI funding used to hire a NEPA crew to start in May. It was mentioned that there may be flexibility to take on additional areas and assist agencies such as the Forest Service. Surveys were done to expedite the project.

Matt Cerney explained that there are FS holes with silviculture, wildlife, fisheries hydrology and recreation. Next steps will be to pull together a Proposed Action Purpose and Need and to work with Sierra Institute on integrating into and moving forward to analysis and work on the ground. Russel Nickerson mentioned that the project initiation letter outlines the FS side and Sierra Institute will add in. *Jonathan Kusel asked what would slow things down.* Matt Cerney and Russel Nickerson respond that it could be responses coming from the outside but that they don't see any big obstacles. Dale Knudsen stated that there won't stumbling blocks with regards to the public and recreation as long as everyone is kept apprised through outreach. Russel Nickerson mentioned that he is in contact with D. Kudsen and others from the West Almanor community.

*Jonathan Kusel asks about where the project may be in October if things go well*

Matt Cerney responds by saying the PAPN will hopefully be done; Russel Nickerson replied saying that it won't be super complicated and prework has already been done. They should be done before that. Dan Knudsen added that this group and any outside interests will be included in an analysis review Aaron Seandel shared the name of longtime resident Ken Wilson. Sherrie Thrall added that Ken Wilson is also the fire chief. Russel Nickerson mentioned that all property owners will get a letter and will have the opportunity to input through public meetings. Matt Cerney then added that even though it's complex he isn't sure it will rise to the EIS level.

The assignment of the NEPA crew is clarified; the specialists hired for silviculture, wildlife, hydrology, and recreation will mostly focus on writing. It's mentioned that there are holes with this work in LNF, and it will be supplemented with support from the Sierra Institute.

Ryan Burnett shared that it will be similar for Robbers Creek, they'll be outsourcing and will have shadow teams to deal with items such as local knowledge. Ryan Burnett and Russel Nickerson explain that Sierra Institute will be doing more prepping and helping with issues but that final review will be on FS side. The work will get easier and faster over time with team leads being critical on both sides. Ryan also shared that two separate teams will overlap for Robbers



Creek and West Shore; they'll be sharing information and communicating. Russel Nickerson commented that the idea is to not have them on the same timeline, that they will be staggered.

#### Robbers Creek

Robbers Creek drains to Mountain Meadows and the project (planned 8-10 years ago) and has aspen components, hydrologic meadow restoration, and upland fuels reduction. There's a desire to keep Mary Lou mini involved in the Robbers Creek project. There CCI and other funds tom play project liaison, and a participant mentioned working with Todd Sloat in doing a role analogous to Sierra Institute in West Shore.

Ryan Nickerson said that Russel has identified a team to meet April 30<sup>th</sup>. He refers to a Project Initiation Letter and highlights that they are working through timelines and responsibilities. He mentioned that is some archaeological survey work to do but they are close to working on the ground. They won't let perfect get in the way of good enough. Russel has identified team, meeting April 30<sup>th</sup>. Project Initiation Letter, working through timelines, responsibilities. Some archaeological survey work to do but pretty close to ready for on the ground. Hope will go quickly. 4,000 acres. Won't let perfect get in way of good enough.

Laura Corral talked about adding to the project area. It would entail addition surveys and possible include the upper part of Betty Sue burn area. They are proposing to treat meadows and riparian areas, with forthcoming details on how it will happen and where equipment will go.

Ryan Burnett mentioned that the biggest complication might be treating the riparian zones, and that right now it's all FS. *Ron Lunder asked if an important meadow with springs in the Eagle Lake Ranger District could be included.* Ryan Burnett responded that it would complicate things to cross district boundaries, even though it's in the watershed. Russel Nickerson stated that it could make sense and be discussed; there's a push to do cross boundary work.

Ryan Burnett mentioned that Bobette Jones is also part of the team and could help facilitate; it could be an opportunity.

#### Collins Pine

Bennie Johnson shared that there is a hold up waiting to hear of an appropriate venue for environmental compliance. Kyle Rogers shared that there's been back and forth with CALFIRE in Sacramento; the concern is about public money being for private benefit. He also stated that it doesn't make sense to do more environmental compliance and that the goal is to get the projects done. Rhianna Dutra mentioned that it's not impossible and that they're still in stream work. Kyle Rogers mentioned that Todd had been involved with a similar project where work was done as part of THP. Rhianna Dutra pointed out that it is federal and so not truly equivalent.

#### SLO

*Bennie Johnson asked if the contract is finalized.* Kyle Rogers said yes but it's not related Jonathan Kusel introduced Chris Serflee a professor at Cal Poly SLO.

[Maidu Summit Consortium](#)

A representative mentioned they will meet with Sierra Institute next week to strategize tribal consultation on smaller projects or will reach out to Tribes that have worked on larger scale projects. There is effort to get tribal components into more projects and excitement about integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge into larger landscape scale projects. Another representative noted that they anticipated acquisition of Tásmam Kojóm (Humbug Valley) within the calendar year and will begin with a cleanup.

[Sierra Pacific Industries](#)

Mike Mitzel shared that he spoke with Kyle the other day; they plan to do work on their own and will not request funding. They plan to have the work done by July. Steve DeBonis said they grabbed some numbers and recently completed fuel breaks around Hwy 36; about 3.5 miles and 680 acres. There are also projects in progress at Warner Valley Road and Juniper Lake road; about 5.3 miles 320 acres. There are plans along Hwy 36 west of Chester and east of 147; about 9.8 miles 897 acres. The grand total is about 57 miles of fuel breaks and 4,600 acres to be done in next 2 years.

Ryan Burnett asked how much will have been completed with regards to lands in WUI in Almanor Basin

Mike Mitzel replied that well over 90% of their property in Almanor Watershed.

Ryan Burnett added that they've been working with SPI in Mountain Meadows; Students and Teachers Restoring Watersheds – schools planting willows in riparian zone.

[Sierra Nevada Conservancy](#)

Participant shared that there are in the second year of surveys; should be done in the next few months depending on snow. They've initiated compliance in two areas around Juniper Lake and are trying to restore fire to headwaters. Interface between park and SPI is scattered ownership. Blueforest is interested in raising money to deal with WUI. Jonathan Kusel mentioned that another project is SCALE, and that Blueforest is part of those meetings employing mechanisms for investment in landscapes that are otherwise difficult to support. There is a planned meeting this may and we are talking about bringing them in to discuss. Kyle Rogers spoke matching scale of investment with scale of projects. It's an opportunity to link with larger scale projects.

Break

[Bureau of Reclamation](#)

*Jonathan Kusel introduces Zeke Lunder.* Zeke Lunder, a geographer and cartographer, grew up in Westwood and attended Chico. He noticed interesting imagery patterns and cultivated a strong interest in prescribed fires. He sold his company to Firestorm, one of the biggest companies implementing prescribed burns along the West Coast. Zeke has a long history of work in timber and forestry. He discusses interest in large, 10,000-acre prescribed burns and details areas of concern, especially areas with steeper slopes, and how the Lassen foothills area showcases fire-adapted ponderosa pine savannah. It's highlighted as a great place to burn but it can't be done



because of adjacent flammable private timber land. He details good and bad places for fire, crown fire verse surface fire, and the opportunities to use fire in approaches to landscape scale management. Another participant notes there could be conflict in balancing fire risk with opportunities to reintroduce fire and suggests looking for low hanging fruit with regards to steep slopes verse flat areas. It's suggested that some places are hard to get to for thinning, but that prescribed fire may be one of the better tools for getting into more remote, steep locations. It's argued that the Forest Service will be uncomfortable burning the area because there is too much fuel. The group goes back and forth about challenges of weighing risks, human capital, and the other factors that help make decisions to burn. It's pointed out that there are additional challenges with checkerboard ownership, bringing teams into managing fires. Participant makes comment that with last 20 years of fire suppression the group could do amazing things if there's political will and desire to spend the money; the participant goes on to suggest that there will be fire whether it's chosen or not, but that they would ideally be able to anticipate it and manage it safely.

*In the SPI conversation, how exactly are projects prioritized?* Participant mentions creating risk raster overlay where each layer has a point value and allows you to score projects. It comes down to the group assigning point values. Another participant offer that everyone has specific favorite projects and that for them personally prevention of loss of life and property are highest priority. Another participant reminds the group that regardless of system, the objective of SPI is prioritization and there can't be too much science-based information. *Participant questions the makeup of mixed conifer systems at higher elevation leading to a discussion about fire intervals for Humboldt Summit, Fredonyer Pass, and Twain Mountain and the mortality of white fire in the last few decades.*

*At this point the facilitator modifies the agenda for quick updates for grants, strategic planning, and the Plants Materials Subcommittee.*

### [New Grant Updates](#)

The Sierra Institute shares study finding the need for watershed coordinators at smaller scales, and received funding for a watershed coordinator for two years to be split between SLWG and LAWG. Butte and Pit also received watershed coordinator, the importance of linking watershed coordinators is important. Sierra Institute asks that participants reach out at the end of the meeting if they would want to participate in the interview process. The hope is to move quickly, within a month or so. A participant asked if the boundary map is for the watershed coordinator and it's explained that it is roughly what was submitted.

### Calf Fire

Scott Henry shared updates from CALFIRE related to overseeing special projects and land use in the Northern region. He commented on fuels reduction crews and well documented resource management. With bringing on equipment operators; they will be doing more large-scale work alongside hand crews. Jonathan Kusel suggests it would be positive to invest in human capital along with investment in landscape. *Jonathan Kusel asks about the criteria used in choosing the initial list of projects.* Henry suggested that CALFIRE units selected priorities based on what could be completed in the short term because some larger ones with CEQA would certainly take



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longer. The Governor approved 1 billion over 5 years, so they will be moving along with some projects under the same funding source.

*What is the role of the group is helping communities establish firewise communities with help of CALFIRE and local fire agencies?* Aware of some differences between CALFIRE and local fire agencies, creates some confusion, maybe problems.

*What is relationship between CALFIRE and local fire agencies?*

Firewise is community responsibility, fire agencies can help but really up to community, city managers, county supervisors, etc. often through local fire department. CALFIRE can provide assistance, don't require.

*With regards to prescribed fire crews, what percentage will be mechanical verse prescribed fire?*

In 80s and 90s most fire was on VMP. There is refocus on developing and adopting more; goal is to have fuels crews be fire use modules, bring fire back in SRAs

## [Plant Materials Subcommittee Update](#)

Though it is mentioned that some members of the Plant Materials Subcommittee are absent, they are working in compiling a specific plant species list through a number of different avenues. The group hopes to look at restoration of traditional plant needs from various perspectives including understory restoration, pollinator and bird needs, local timber production, nursery needs and seed banks. It is noted that the Governor's CA Biodiversity Initiative works to catalog and seed bank every species in California. Another participant notes the importance of native plant species for Maidu and local communities.

## [Strategic Planning and Related Updates](#)

*It was decided to push a discussion of Strategic Planning to the next meeting.*

## [Meeting Wrap Up](#)

A participant mentioned that the Robber's Creek (Mini) meeting will not be public but that a public field trip will happen. It was asked about someone regularly participating in SLWG and the response was to defer to the agency. Trish Puterbaugh mentioned that the concern is that the project has already been designed before it goes public. If the public is involved it would help the case. Russel Nickerson spoke about trying to get FS input and that it is a little different with a collaborative group. Team lead should be identified in order to talk with them.

Ryan Burnett said that anyone in the group can reach out; the issue becomes who gets to be in the meeting and how are you deciding. Russel Nickerson mentioned that during the initial team building phase it may not be desirable to have the team dynamics out in public. Jonathan Kusel added that they are exploring a different kind of relationship with the agency and Ryan Burnett said that it's charting new ground and that this collaborative effort will take a lot of input.

Jonathan Kusel encourages continue conversation even through awkward moments.