

South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting

Tuesday, October 29, 2019 1:00 - 4:00pm

Chester Public Utility District, 251 Chester Airport Rd, Chester, CA 96020

Meeting Synopsis

The South Lassen Watersheds Group (SWLG) met in Chester, CA to discuss the Robbers/Mini and West Shore projects and prioritize planning projects for CalFire's CCI Forest Health grant.

Attendees

Ken Roby – Trout Unlimited	Jake Blaufuss – Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI)
Ryan Burnett – Point Blue Conservation Science	Steve Buckley – LVNP
Chris Hemping – Lassen National Forest (LNF)	Laurel Sacco – Sierra Institute
Bennie Johnson – Collins Pine	Ryan Tarver – Utah State University
Alisha Wilson – Maidu Summit Consortium (MSC)	Steve Debonis - SPI
Lorena Gorbet - MSC	Wolfy Rougle – Butte County RCD
Sophie Castleton – Sierra Institute	Dale Knutsen – AWCC Firewise
Kyle Rodgers – Sierra Institute	Laura Corral - LNF
Russell Nickerson - LNF	Kristy Hoffman – Sierra Nevada Conservancy
Jim Richardson – Lassen Volcanic National Park (LVNP)	Dan Martynn – Natural Resource Conservation Services

Action Items

- Sierra Institute to schedule conference call with strategic planning subcommittee
- Sierra Institute and LNF to discuss Stewardship Strategic Planning (Region 3).
- Strategic planning subcommittee to continue project prioritization while accepting input from SLWG.

Meeting Opening

Jonathan Kusel called the meeting to order at 1:05pm. Jim Richardson motioned to approve the agenda, Ken Roby seconded, and the agenda was approved. Dan Martynn then motioned to approve the previous meeting's minutes. Steve Buckley seconded and the group approved the minutes.

West Shore Community Wildfire Protection Project

Kyle Rodgers explained that the West Shore Community Wildfire Protection Project's official scoping period ended and that the LNF and partners are responding to comments. The project now includes additional acreage from the Plumas National Forest. Dale Knutsen asked if there had been signification objections, and Kyle responded that there were some minor concerns about treatments areas near houses and that some varying opinions on desired forest conditions but overall the project seemed to have a good deal of community support. Some community members questioned the project's timeline. Jonathan asked Dale if he'd heard comments directly from community members, and Dale shared he'd only heard very positive comments. The community appears anxious for the project to move forward. Kyle explained how the partnership between Sierra Institute and the LNF had experienced some bumps here and there, but also emphasized there has generally been a strong pilot-partnership and collaborative effort with plenty of lessons learned. Other project partners such as Sierra Pacific Industries, Collins Pines Company, and the Maidu Summit Consortium have moved forward with work on adjacent lands and look forward to cross-boundary treatments. Lorena Gorbet mentioned that the MSC expects to receive the deed to the Maidu Forest Parcel from PG&E before the end of the year. Ryan Burnett wondered about the project's effects on recreation and camp closures. Russell Nickerson responded that there would possibly be some recreation closures but minimal interruption overall. With the hopes of keeping the project positive, LNF intends to be open and transparent with recreationists within the community. Jake Blaufuss asked about

Limited Operating Period considerations from the perspective of purchasers and emphasized the difficulty of a two-year timeframe to implement treatments.

[Robbers Creek Watershed Project Updates](#)

Ryan shared that their team held a public field tour on October 15th. It was well attended and they closed scoping for the project last Friday (October 25th). They've received very few comments and are moving forward with the timeline for the environmental review. The LNF has done a majority of the legwork in leading surveys and interdisciplinary teams, but efforts for the environmental review will now transition to the partners. Ryan also shared that project partners walked through Childs Meadow to further develop project concepts – with the Tehama RCD taking the lead for survey work, The THP and the long-term monitoring work is mostly done. Project partners will submit the Rock Creek Harvest Plan very soon. Collins Pine is in discussions with the LNF about using a Forest Service road for Childs Meadows. Ryan and Russell Nickerson will hold a meeting with engineers to discuss the possibility of taking out specific trees to improve access for Collins Pine.

[CCI Prioritization and Mapping Session](#)

The SLWG footprint has approached nearly 850,000 acres, and the discussion to progress towards truly landscape level work has continued this fall as the strategic planning subcommittee has discussed priority projects leading up to a new round of CalFire grants. Implementation for the West Shore and Robbers Creek projects will be included in the CCI proposals to show progress in transitioning from planning toward implementation from the previous CalFire funding. March 2024 is the timeline for new grants. Money will be awarded next summer.

Ryan noted that even with the mechanisms of the MSA between Sierra Institute and LNF, they don't have NEPA signed yet so it may benefit us to not assume we'll be implementing before a final decision on the project next year. Russell agreed, emphasizing that from a legal standpoint the agency must be careful. The alternative would be to wait another year to work through NEPA in order to avoid being pre-decisional – project partners must acknowledge the parameters that the agency works within and still make a compelling case for funding. The group discussed options to pursue CCI funding for service work at West Shore and Robbers Creek and then conduct timber sales within the existing MSA. Jonathan added that if the group wasn't collaborating with Russell and Forest Supervisor Deb Bumpass then he'd be much less confident moving forward with this combination of planning and implementation.

Jonathan presented images of the SLWG boundary from the group's initiation in 2017 as well as the current footprint. The map indicates current projects supported by SNC, CalFire and NFWF, and also depicts the proposed planning area around Gurnsey Creek. There are many different ownerships within the area, and the group discussed weaving the project into existing efforts by Firewise communities in Mineral and other communities. Kyle explained that these maps still depict a very rough boundary, but he mentioned it's approximately 100,000 acres and will take a big, collaborative effort to address NEPA at this scale. Project partners will develop ways to share surveys while staying within NEPA regulations. Jim emphasized LVNP's interest in this collaborative effort and added that there was a lot of opportunity for work in the area. Mineral and Mill Creek residents are very interested in treating the landscape around the communities to create more resilience to fire. Steve suggested that LVNP would share whatever resources available, and Ryan stated that if the group felt it had the capacity to take on this scale of a project then they should go forward with it. Jake Blaufuss explained some of the difficulties that might result from large scale project implementation, especially with projects private companies might already have under contract and the relatively short window of these grants. There's a lot of volume with strict termination dates; they haven't heard much back from the region with regards to contract term adjustments.

The strategic planning subcommittee is continually looking for feedback and direction from the broader group. They will continue meeting to further develop this project for the CalFire CCI application deadline at the beginning of December. Jonathon proposed a large conference call in the next week.

Fish Passage and Whirling Disease Study

Ken Roby introduced Laurel Sacco, a Sierra Institute and Trout Unlimited Fellow, and provided the origins of the project and broad landscape assessment in the Upper Feather River Basin to conduct watershed condition analysis with a particular focus for habitat condition for native trout. Laurel has looked at priority pathogens in the Upper Feather River Watershed, and is identifying needs and actions for public outreach and education, meadow restoration techniques, equipment decontamination between organizations, and pathogen control and monitoring. Laurel and project partners will identify how this work can support prioritization for planning and implementation efforts for the SLWG.

<https://sierrainstitute.us/first-steps-in-managing-an-invasive-aquatic-pathogen-in-the-feather-river-basin/>

Partner Updates

Ryan mentioned they've completed an assessment and prioritization of meadow restoration within the Storrie Fire footprint by looking at climate change, road densities, and other factors and then meeting with the Forest Service to better understand the agency's priorities for restoration. The top priorities were within Colby Creek, and they've now finished designs for seven projects. The previous funding was mainly to identify and design projects – so there are now five meadow restoration projects in the pipeline.

The Maidu Summit Consortium received the title to Tàsmam Kojòm at the end of August – they had their celebration on site and invited many longtime partners, community members, and guests. The rest of their forthcoming properties should be returned this winter and they hope to make progress on small-scale thinning projects at the campground. The land is open to the public with the same rules going forward.

Steve updated the group on their Flatiron project – a Sierra Nevada Conservancy-funded project with a crosscut crew. They've completed seven miles and 10,000 trees and have now put in for a second 24,000 acres for a second phase for the Juniper and Inspiration areas to prep fire units for 2022 and 2024. Depending on climate and weather, they plan to burn piles and will hopefully conduct underburning within the next year. The crosscut crews displayed dramatically improved effectiveness as they gained experience, and LVNP plans to develop a briefing to explain the work accomplished.

Wolfy Rougle, the Watershed Coordinator for the Butte County Resource Conservation District, provided updates on developing collaborative projects in Butte County. They have less public land and fewer large, industrial private landowners, and there are challenging restoration decisions at their elevation. They wrestle with how much effort they might spend on mitigating brush to allow regeneration of oak – a major task. She mentioned that SLWG members were welcome to attend their RCD or Wildlands Task Force meetings as they continue their restoration and recovery efforts for Campfire and Paradise.

Jonathan provided a reminder that the SCALE meeting will be November 5th and 6th in Sacramento. Conversations will focus on collaborative efforts working toward landscape scale work.

Dov Weinman shared that the SNC quarterly board meeting will be on December 11th and 12th at Childs Meadow. There will be a tour on the 11th followed by a reception in the evening.

Meeting Wrap-up

The next meeting will be Tuesday, January 28th. Items for the agenda will include: what was proposed in the CCI grant, report on the SNC board meeting, and a discussion of successes with Stewardship Strategic Planning from Region three.