

South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting

Tuesday, August 27th, 2019 1:00 - 4:00pm

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

Meeting Synopsis

The South Lassen Watersheds Group (SLWG) met in Chester, CA to discuss the Robbers/Mini and West Shore projects, review the draft guidelines for membership and decision-making, and re-engage with subcommittee work and strategic planning timelines.

Attendees

Ryan Burnett	Point Blue Conservation Science	Serena Bruin	United States Forest Service (USFS)
Steve Buckley	Lassen Volcanic National Park (LVNP)	Bobette Jones	USFS
Wolfy Rougle	Butte County RCD	Coye Burnett	USFS
Dale Knutsen	AWCC Firewise Communities	Peter Coombe	Department of Water Resources
Ron Lunder	Mountain Meadows Conservancy	Hannah Hepner	Plumas Fire Safe Council
Laura Corral	Lassen National Forest (LNF)	Trish Puterbaugh	Lassen Forest Preservation Group
Wes Watts	LNF	Danielle Berry	Sierra Institute
Sherrie Thrall	Plumas County Board of Supervisors	Kyle Rogers	Sierra Institute
Alisha Wilson	Maidu Summit Consortium	Bennie Johnson	Collins Pine
Russel Nickerson	LNF	Ken Roby	Feather River Trout Unlimited
Jim Richardson	LVNP	Dan Martynn	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Sheli Wingo	US Fish & Wildlife Service	Nils Lunder	Feather River Land Trust
Steve Debonis	Sierra Pacific Industries	Jonathan Kusel	Sierra Institute
Rob Rianda	Tehama County RCD	Dov Weinman	Sierra Institute

Action Items

- Update protocols for Membership and Decision-Making (Sierra Institute)
- West Shore Public Field Tour (USFS and Sierra Institute)
- Inform SLWG Members about Robbers Creek Field Tour (Point Blue Conservation Science)

Meeting Opening

Jonathan Kusel called the meeting to order and initiated introductions at 1:05pm. Jonathan suggested moving the Robbers project presentation earlier so latecomers might participate in the membership and decision-making discussion. Minutes from July's meeting were approved without modification.

Robbers/Mini Project Presentation

Ryan Burnett introduced the Robber's Creek Watershed Restoration Project as a collaboration between Point Blue Conservation Science, Sierra Institute, USFS, Forest Creek Restoration, and the SLWG. This 4,700-acre watershed scale restoration project includes upland forests, aspen stands, and meadows within the North Fork of the Feather River. Conceived in 2009, this project is part of the initial CCI funding within a larger suite of projects from the SLWG. The USFS is working with partners from Sierra Institute on required surveys, purpose and needs, and proposed actions. Scoping and the first public field tour are expected in September and there will be additional public meetings in October. Specialists will develop reports between November and January when a draft EA will be completed. Ryan emphasized the objectives of the Robbers/Mini Project to restore watershed health by implementing treatments that improve ecological resilience of aspen, meadow, stream, and riparian habitats. Past issues of fire suppression and overly dense forests, grazing and meadow use as a dairy, and extensive roads have all negatively impacted the area. Project partners plan to address issue of vulnerability, which are multiplied by the effects of climate change. Ryan also explained goals to reduce stand density in upland forests to

increase forest resilience, to shift stand structure to increase the use of fire as a tool, and to enhance wildlife habitat conditions. Partners also hope to reverse meadow conversion to forests, extend dry season soil moisture, retain soil carbon, improve conditions for wet meadow plant community and enhance bird habitat. Laura Corral emphasized the project will also acknowledge the community, and they plan to consider economic and educational components of the project. When asked about long-term studies on meadow and aspen restoration, Ryan responded that the desired conditions for aspen recruitment are most often evident in fenced areas, and mentioned plans for adjustments to grazing to accommodate project objectives. Ryan described that next steps will involve monitoring, though even with the fair amount of flexibility in the California Climate Investment funding applications, current funding is purely for planning. A three-year grant could potentially be used for long-term monitoring; he suggested the SLWG put together monitoring plans for each project and consider pace, scale, and efficacy to capture how projects are working and how the collaborative functions. SLWG expressed approval that project partners plan to burn all possible units. Ryan finished his presentation by welcoming SLWG members to the upcoming field trip.

Draft Guidelines for Membership and Decision-Making (decision)

Historically SLWG's decision-making has been organic and generally unanimous, but Jonathan emphasized the importance of developing rules in preparation for future disagreement. The group will benefit from being able to defer to established documentation. At July's meeting, the group tasked the Sierra Institute to draft a template for guidelines for membership and decision-making based on previous discussions with members and partner organizations. Sierra Institute provided SLWG members with a draft a few days prior to the meeting. Group members agreed an important first step is agreeing on who gets to vote. According to the draft protocols any SLWG can vote and a member is any individual or representative of an entity that signs the MOU. There are no limitations for participants to talk or participate, but voting will be restricted to members. The offer to sign the MOU is open for anyone, but the group questioned if there might be a minimum amount of meetings any member must attend to show they're participating in good faith. Multiple members voiced concern about irregular participation or the possibility that group members might not participate consistently but then might show up for specific decisional meetings and "throw stones" at the collaborative efforts of regular participants. Ken Roby suggested that the facilitator should keep track of participant attendance and contact them if they're absent from meetings for a calendar year.

Sherrie Thrall asked if any regularly attending member was unable to legally sign the MOU? Jonathan mentioned the MOU was intentionally non-confrontational, and Jim Richardson suggested that even members who choose not to sign the MOU due to a small item might be able to submit a letter of intent as an alternative way for inclusion as a member. Jonathan synthesized the group's discussion to say that the definition of a member of the SLWG was a signatory to the MOU, a representative of any organization that has signed the MOU, or someone who has submitted a letter of request for membership. Dan Martynn made a motion to support this summary. Alisha Wilson seconded. The group unanimously approved these protocols for establishing membership.

With regard to how many votes each organization receives, Jonathan offered that the Maidu Summit Consortium receive multiple votes due to their historical relationship with the land and the sovereign status of some entities within the MSC board. Wolfy Rougle agreed, saying it felt odd that a single community member might have the same voting power as the MSC or USFS. Alisha suggested that any member of the MSC who might want to represent their own family or Tribe could submit the letter of interest to become SLWG member as previously discussed. This was acknowledged as an appropriate alternative and there was unanimous agreement for one vote for each individual and one for each entity.

Ken advocated for not establishing limitations to defining a quorum and Ryan suggested the group use its discretion based on which players were at the table. This was met with general approval.

The group sought clarity in understanding what type of emergency decisions might require a steering or executive committee. Jonathan suggested that in most cases it would be letters of support or decisions regarding grant applications. Ron Lunder suggested the facilitator or coordinator distribute an email poll for emergency items and that members be given three to five days to respond. It's the responsibility of members to update the coordinator of any contact information changes. Any steering committee will look to the MOU to determine if the emergency item is consistent with the group's goals and purpose.

Sierra Institute staff will attempt to articulate how the SLWG will make decisions by consensus or alignment, which is defined as all members supporting a decision as if it were their own. If this isn't possible after an appropriate amount of discussion, the group will decide based on majority vote. Multiple members suggested that a vote reaching 75% approval would be a sufficient majority. If unable to reach this majority, those who voted against will be tasked with developing alternatives; the goal is to ultimately reach consensus or alignment. Pending a discussion on the actual language provided for the group to review, 75% will count as a majority in the case of a vote.

Group members agreed an item will only be decided upon if it is noted as a decisional item on the agenda. Other items may be discussed and then moved to the next meeting as a decisional item. An item may also be moved to a subsequent meeting if it's decided the meeting lacks the appropriate perspectives or players. Steve Buckley explained that agencies already have their own decision-making processes. The SLWG must be intentional about the language used in decision-making and note in documentation that decisional items won't include relevant agency items with legal restrictions and obligations (e.g. NEPA).

[West Shore Community Wildfire Protection Project](#)

Kyle Rogers introduced the West Shore Community Wildfire Protection Project, a collaboration between the USFS, Sierra Institute, and the SLWG. This California Climate Investment funded project was a priority for the LNF as well as the SLWG. The 6,100-acre project has been pushed through an accelerated pace of planning and partners are busy documenting lessons learned and takeaways from the partnership process. Purposes include reducing hazardous fuels and risks of high-intensity fire in the Wildland-Urban-Interface, improving forest health, providing economic benefit to local communities, and improving recreation areas. Mixed conifer stands are overstocked and with the historical fire, weather, and terrain influences there is an elevated likelihood of fires within the project area. Kyle emphasized planned improvements to the Lake Almanor Recreation Trail, to the North and South Campgrounds, and for motor vehicle accessibility. Kyle shared project maps depicting different treatment areas, and mentioned that various proposed actions were written with somewhat general language in order for flexibility and further evaluation.

Alisha advocated for more Tribal input and monitoring of the project and questioned when Tribal members would be brought into the process. Kyle acknowledged the valuable perspective of the MSC and stated that project partners are looking forward to engaging Tribal perspective and knowledge. Steve Debonis mentioned that SPI parcels adjacent to the project are also high-risk areas and will soon be treated. Trish Puterbaugh followed with questions about treatments within PAC areas and whether are indications of nesting eagles within the project. Wes Watt answered that there is still some surveying to be done. They'll continue adjusting to new information with the goal to create good habitat with the PACs. Russell Nickerson mentioned that scoping for the project will begin tomorrow, August 28th. SLWG members are involved in the scoping process and there are a wide diversity of groups and landowners who have shown interest in the project. Kyle then referenced Sierra Institute staff developing a Communications Plan with some support from the USFS and Steve Buckley and LVNP.

Strategic Planning Subcommittee Updates

Jonathan described the subcommittee's work over the last year, goals for developing the strategic plan, and how it continues to inform the group's work. The subcommittee has been writing up issues, preparing to map resources, and describing what actions need to be taking. The strategic plan will lead to project prioritization and will detail how the group approaches projects. Ryan described it a way as codifying processes that the SLWG is already carrying out. The strategic plan will increase the likelihood of generating support and steer the group towards priorities and projects with multiple benefits. Ken added that at the beginning of August the group discussed how they will implement projects, address capacity issues, and identify barriers to effectively complete projects. The group also discussed the integration of Maidu Traditional Ecological Knowledge into strategic planning and project implementation. Partners expressed desire to truly integrate TEK into the landscape and avoid the pitfalls of just implementing Maidu TEK into little demonstration spots here and there.

SLWG Grant Updates

Kyle explained working closely with partners from Collins Pine to advance work on the projects at Rock Creek and Childs Meadow. Ryan explained how the recent field tour at Childs Meadow may lead to further coordination of upland forest treatments and potential collaboration on FS land. Another round of funding may come out in October and Ryan urged the group to consider moves to implement existing projects.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy has provided funding for implementation and planning in a mixture of areas surrounding Juniper Lake. Steve Buckley explained how LVNP continues efforts to punch holes in the southern part of the park that hasn't seen fire within the last 70 years. The Sierra Institute-Park Service joint-effort eight-person crew has been very efficient and effective, they're in the homestretch of their work and are in the process of pile burning. They hope to carryout under-burning this year. Jim emphasized the importance of smaller projects tying into the bigger mosaic of collaboration within the larger landscape and pointed out that SNC continues to hold strong interest in supporting such endeavors.

Jonathan shared that the Bureau of Reclamation funding was finalized and the Department of Conservation's Forest Health and Watershed Coordinator Program was officially awarded. Wolfy and the Butte County RCD were also recipients – four of the eight Watershed Coordinator grantees are in the Northern Sierra/Southern Cascade landscape.

Meeting Wrap-Up

Sheli Wingo from the US Fish & Wildlife Service introduced herself and mentioned she hadn't heard about the SLWG until the Childs Meadow field trip the previous week. Though their potential funding amounts are relatively small, their funds are discretionary and she is actively looking ways to support and add value to projects, especially for meadow restoration. She looks forward to further opportunities to collaborate.

In previous meetings SLWG members suggested a set meeting schedule every other month. Members agreed to schedule meetings on the last Tuesday of every other month. The next meeting will be Tuesday, October 29th.