

South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting

Tuesday March 30, 1:00 - 3:30pm

Zoom

Meeting Synopsis:

In the South Lassen Watersheds Group's March meeting, collaborative members discussed the West Lassen Headwaters Project (WLHP) timeline, reviewed the 2021 SLWG member resolutions developed in the January meeting, and discussed opportunities for project input. Deer Creek Resources presented GIS mapping tools to prioritize work within the SLWG boundary.

Attendees:

Laura Corral – Lassen National Forest
Sophie Castleton – Sierra Institute
Jim Richardson – Lassen Volcanic National Park
Lorena Gorbet – Maidu Summit Consortium
Jake Blaufuss – Sierra Pacific Industries
Jonathan Kusel – Sierra Institute
Tuli Potts – Sierra Nevada Conservancy
Zeke Lunder – Deer Creek Resources
Kristy Hoffman – Sierra Nevada Conservancy
Tom McCubbins – RCD of Tehama County
Steve Buckley – Lassen Volcanic National Park
Bennie Johnson – Collins Pine
Jim Early – US Fish and Wildlife Service
Ken Roby – Feather River Trout Unlimited

Spencer Lachman – Sierra Institute
Michael Hall – Feather River RCD
Kyle Rodgers – Sierra Institute
Wolfy Rougle – Butte County RCD
Nick Bunch – Lassen National Forest
Kelly Mosinski
Russell Nickerson – Lassen National Forest
Jason Mateljak – Lassen Volcanic National Park
Bernice McProud
Gabe Schultz – Cal Fire
Trish Puterbaugh – Lassen Forest Preservation Gp
Janie Ackley – Lassen National Forest
Matt Cerney – Lassen National Forest

Meeting Opening:

There were no comments on previous meeting notes. The group entertained a motion to approve the January meeting minutes, and the minutes were approved. The group entertained a motion to approve the agenda, and the agenda was approved. There was a minor change to the agenda due to lack of time – the group did not get to talking about the SLWG boundary; will be addressed at future meeting.

Project Updates

West Shore Community Wildfire Protection Project: Draft DN and FONSI will go out next week, starting the 45-day objection period.

Robber's Creek Watershed Restoration Project: The Draft DN and FONSI are out now and the project is currently in the 45-day objection period. The project will move forward if no objections are raised. Trish asked if the LNF is expecting any objections, Russell responded not at the moment.

Deer Creek Resources Inc.

- Zeke Lunder presented GIS products by Deer Creek Resources Inc. designed to analyze the landscape and prioritize project work. Deer Creek is writing a narrative report to add context and more detail and make it more operationally specific and will hand over this information to Sierra Institute. Users can tweak things and run the model however they want. Zeke has run the 1st – 3rd drafts of the model, comparing the data to being out on the ground.
- Zeke has been collecting GIS layers since he was in high school and has a lot of data! He went through data and tried to pull out what is useful.

- Starting point for landscape-scale fire hazard assessment: LANDFIRE – some stuff didn't make sense (e.g. crown base height). A weak link in mapping and modeling is that it's hard to find good data sets for forest fuel conditions.
- Salo Forest Observatory data – provides a good layer showing canopy closure. Canopy closure is a pretty good metric for prioritizing thinning. Zeke reviewed this data and compared it to field observations/photos.
- Zeke sees canopy base height as the overall best measure of forest condition.
- Zeke walked the group through the weighting system for how to prioritize certain areas for treatments; for example: they looked at features like the PCT, wild and scenic rivers, places with high severity burns within last 15 years, low-moderate severity in last 15 years, WUI, forest vegetation types etc.
 - They gave a lower score to higher elevation red fir forest and shrub as thinning isn't a priority there.
 - They buffered the meadows and gave the area a higher score around margins of meadows, in order to meet meadow restoration objectives and reduce conifer encroachment.
 - Areas above 5,500 ft. got a lower score (reasoning is biggest problems often aren't in high elevation forests).
- The first map Zeke discussed was in the Westwood area: the flat areas north of Westwood are lower priority for thinning, WUI areas right around Westwood are high priority, the south side of Walker lake is higher priority (based on slope and density), the south side of Lake Almanor is a high priority, along with Collins pine land that hasn't been thinned, and the West shore of Lake Almanor (WUI, proximity to major roads, stand density).
- Bennie is looking at doing some work in Collins
- Zeke pointed out some artifacts on the map: Deep creek of Mill Creek canyon originally jumped out as a high priority candidate – but due to the unpopularity of logging in wild and scenic rivers, they unweighted that. Some deeper discussions on what to prioritize are necessary. Other artifacts result from the 'management by polygon' tendency – hard edges on landscape show up in GIS.
- The second map Zeke walked the group through was a prescribed fire assessment on intermixed private land, which leans heavily on stand density mapping. Fire severity from previous fires was weighted heavily in an effort to determine where is ready for another low-severity fire.
- Steve – For wilderness, we know we don't want high-severity fire because of resource values that exist. Stand density is much higher now – it makes more sense to use the infrastructure that's there rather than tying pieces of high priority areas together.
- Jake – This group is trying to get beyond management by polygons. This data can be adjusted by priorities for a given area; we can adjust inputs to move a priority one way or another (e.g. Mill Creek).
- Lorena – the role of TEK involves listening to the land, going out and observing the conditions around you – getting out there and being there to see and hear what it needs.
- Trish appreciates the simplicity of the map and is interested in the report. She agrees with Lorena on the importance of observing conditions on the ground.
- Ken agrees it's a great product; it gets you to think about priorities – existing versus desired conditions. 30 years ago the standard approach was fix the worst places, now it's focus on the places that are closest to the desired condition – factoring in accessibility and cost. We need

to look at the landscape factor; what can we burn every year? Maybe the worst places aren't the places to do that.

- Zeke emphasized the importance of encouraging cross-boundary projects in order to build in flexibility. He also mentioned the mapping tools can help us analyze which forest fires to let burn – and think about how we can do a project that buys some decision space for a line officer during a fire. The reality is we will continue to have large, long-burning fires – we need to prioritize thinning in areas that will assist line officers.
- Nick – Agrees that prioritizing greatest values at risk is a great strategic starting point and that moving away from polygon-based fire prescription is important. As we build our capacity (more emphasis and more funding), we need to move away from easy places to challenging places.
- We are not only managing for a fire in that specific location but for fires that have a trajectory and a magnitude. Middle fork came out of high elevation fire. Biggest hang-up is in our outreach; it's hard to do cross-boundary planning from a federal standpoint. Nick can't strategically plan on bringing fire across private land – it's based on the safest strategy in the moment. **If we can have those strategic conversations earlier in a collaborative setting, the outcome would be better.** Nick would advocate to burn in Mill Creek and Deer Creek – but not through traditional forest service methods (1 person per drip torch). There's going to be elevated mortality – it might look messy for 50 years. Main emphasis is maintenance. He's bringing up a lot of challenges but doesn't think they're insurmountable
- Ken Roby agrees it is helpful for stakeholders to know all the options on the table.
- Zeke – will cause more harm than good if we only go in with one entry. Need to burn up dead trees every 7-10 years for 50 years. It's a long-term commitment. There's no cohesive long-term strategy, they can change every presidential election; how do we build a culture that survives these changes in public opinion and political priorities?
- Jake – Recommends reducing fuels in overstocked stands before prescribed burns and putting it into a product or energy when possible. Areas on the Moonlight fire were re-burned in the Sheep fire – From his observations, that landscape is sterile after 2 high-severity burns and will likely be for 50 -100 yrs. We need to look at what current conditions are before we start talking about treatments.
- Jonathan mentioned that a tour to some of these areas would be cool (Rock Creek trip coming up!)
- Bennie – in respect to cross-boundary potential for prescribed fire – we need to have a conversation about liability. Unless 100% liability is taken off the private landowner, it's a non-starter.
- Michael Hall – legislation being discussed that would reduce liability for burn bosses – the logistics of getting fire out there will require agency/community help. RCD trying to get folks trained, local fire volunteer dept. had good turnout. Burn windows are already infrequent, may become less frequent in future – time and human power limitations.
- JK thanks SNC for seed funding/planning funding

West Lassen Headwaters Project (WLHP) Planning

Planning subgroups for WLHP Collaboration

- In the WLHP, we are starting from a different place than previous projects prioritized by this group– it is a much larger area (100 -150,000 ac. compared to 5-6,000) and the SLWG is going to have a more active role in identifying current and desired conditions for the

landscape and developing treatment recommendations as well as (hopefully) facilitating a cross-boundary workforce.

- Sierra Institute is researching how best to develop this planning process and is looking at the idea of forming planning sub-groups to assist in collaborative project development.
- In talking with the strategic planning subcommittee earlier this month, we discussed a couple different approaches including framing these subgroups by the desired actions we are discussing, or the location of the desired actions. Developing how these groups will function is ongoing and we'd appreciate input from the group.

Planning subgroup desired outputs:

- Rapid macro- assessment
 - A first step: Identify what data we have available for the landscape and where we may want to prioritize further data collection & survey work; determining what we need, and why we need it.
- Collaborative development of purpose & need
 - Example from Lobert project on Fremont-Winema NF
 - Groups to start developing current and desired conditions for the landscape – provide some discussion points for what we want to prioritize
- Activity Cards: The identification of desired restoration actions and resource-specific considerations.
 - Concept from a project on the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis on the Tongass NF – it was not a fully successful project, but we can learn from the process
 - Would occur further down the line (not in 2021)
 - Provides an initial template to help us think about what we want to do, where we want to do it, and how we want to protect resources without knowing the site-specific details up front

Group Discussion:

- Russell – strategic planning has gone back and forth on how to organize this process. We are starting at a new point with this project – surveys and PAPN haven't been done yet. We are looking at a big footprint and want to figure out how best to engage the collaborative and gain input. We want to come to a common vision so when we are working towards our desired conditions we know we're on the same page.
- Jim – We need to think about where the communities are in this process? Especially those that are vulnerable, to be able to support this program they would need to feel something is mitigated in their community in order to support this actively. We need to have things moving so residents can recognize that this working together will make things safer.
- Tom- coming from perspective of fire planning projects – if you get a lot of community members involved, their input/proposals can sometimes be a little self-serving “the most important thing is my hunk of heaven” – need to remind people it's about saving the whole community
- Kyle – There's hopefully some strength in a dual but connected approach – direct focus work happening immediately in those communities

SLWG 2021 Resolutions Follow-up

- In the January meeting, SLWG members brainstormed resolutions: things they want to see happen in the group over the course of the next year.

- Sierra Institute reviewed these resolutions in a two-part synthesis process. First Dov synthesized the notes and split them into 4 categories: (1) capacity development, (2) communication, outreach, and engagement; (3) Planning; (4) Implementation and cross-boundary work. Then Jonathan, Sophie and Kyle met to consolidate the resolutions.
- We would like the group's input. What did we miss? Did we mischaracterize anything? We'd also like the group's input on we should move forward with the resolutions.
- Tom can see benefit to adding projects from private landowners/partners to the SLWG overview map – it will help mold future projects and get the most bang for your buck.
- 'Wildfire response plan' in the resolutions should be changed to 'fire management plan' – LVNP has a fire management plan – it is important as it would give decision space for the managers (they are the ones that will make the go or no go decisions that would let wildfire continue on the landscape – group actions could appropriately prepare)
- Nick – even if we do NEPA on a project we don't end up implementing, when it comes to a wildfire, that NEPA doc will help make mgmt. decisions. In this checkerboard forest, I advocate for a fire management plan. Over time it will inform wildland forest response in decisions we make in mgmt.
- Wolfy – emphasized the importance of maintenance (following up on treatments). She'd like to have a sense of where the obstacles are to completing maintenance in a timely manner and make those a priority.
- Nick – 2 barriers to maintenance: (1) maintenance issues can stem from NEPA – any NEPA prior to 2016 has to have a survey done for archeology because Section 6 altered the intensity of the survey. (2) Changing people's perspectives on where to prioritize

SLWG/Public Comment on Projects

- Jonathan and Russell opened up a discussion on how the SLWG might function better to provide a space to discuss public input on projects, focusing specifically on the Robber's Creek and West Shore EAs at the moment.
- Trish – how do we collaborate effectively if our comments on projects aren't being considered? The public is not in the SLWG as much as I'd like it to be- it's complicated. How do we better take consideration of people's comments?
- Russell – We're trying to figure out what roles we play and where the decision space is. Would like to figure out how to get more involvement from collaborative group members and have these discussions more openly as a collaborative group, give voice to it. We need to determine how we discuss comments as a group once they are made. USFS writing often isn't clear enough for the public, especially in describing what our desired conditions are. If the public can't understand the picture of the desired conditions, maybe the USFS isn't writing it in the right way. Russell asks if the collaborative group can help with that.
- Jonathan – this is about finding space for agreement and discussing concerns. If the SLWG is a space for yes decisions only, that is not going to work. Avoiding the legal route can fulfill the mission of the collaborative, but we don't mean to deter disagreements. How we deal with disagreements defines us.

Partner Updates

Sierra Nevada Conservancy: Immediate wildfire resilience and forest health funding is delayed, the legislature is on recess and will be back April 5. SNC will keep you posted on projects– if you aren't receiving the email blast from Kristy and Tuli please contact them.

Feather River RCD: Michael Hall announced a prescribed burn happening in Indian Valley on March 31. The RCD is cohosting a collaborative stakeholder exchange with the UC Extension in person on May 2.

Butte County RCD: The website is up for the Colby Mountain recreation area planning process
Tehama County RCD: CCI Tinder Smart Tehama program – looking for funding to refund that. The RCD is putting together a planning grant to remove cattle off of Antelope, Mill, Paines Creek watersheds. Found implementation and planning \$\$; the RCD is heading in new direction.

Fire wise in Mineral and Mill Creek: Jim mentioned there's a grant due in May for close end fuels work on homes and structures in Mineral and Mill Creek.

Rock Creek Field Tour May 6th, 10 am

Next SLWG meeting: May 25th