

**South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting**  
**Tuesday, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 1:00-3:45 pm**

**Meeting Synopsis:**

In the South Lassen Watersheds Group's (SLWG) September meeting, collaborative members listened to updates from the Forest Service, the Park Service, Collins Pine, and Deer Creek Resources about the effects of the Dixie Fire on the SLWG area. The group then discussed immediate rehabilitation efforts that agencies and partners are initiating and trying to complete before winter precipitation. Partners also provided updates and expressed some of their immediate concerns and priorities post-Dixie Fire. The group concluded with a short progress report on the ForSys modeling effort, led by Alan Ager.

**Attendees:**

Amye Osti- 34 North	Kristina McBurney Maahs-Resident
Andrea Craig- The Nature Conservancy	Kyle Rodgers-Sierra Institute
Andrew Barton- Local Resident	Laura Corral-LNF
Bella Bledsoe-Sierra Institute	Laura McLean-USFWS
Bennie Johnson-Collins Pine	Lynn Coster- Cal EPA
Cameron George-LNF	Maiya Greenwood-American Rivers
Coye Burnett-LNF	Mary Davidge-Local Resident
Diana Craig- US Forest Service	Matthew Bokach-LNF
Daniel Kunches- Feather River Land Trust	Matt Barton-Local Resident
Dan Ostmann-LVNP	Matt Reno-SPI
Griffin Perea- Cal EPA	Michael Hall-Feather River RCD
Heidi Van Gieson-LNF	Nick Bunch-LNF
Janie Ackley-LNF	Nils Lunder- Feather River Land Trust
Jannike Allen- Sierra Institute	Peggy Fulder-LAWG
Jason Mateljak-LVNP	Rob Rianda; RCD of Tehama County
Jeff Sanchez-CDFW	Ron Lunder- MMC
Jerry BigEagle-Susanville Indian Rancheria	Ryan Burnett- Point Blue Conservation Sci.
Jim Richardson-LVNP	Sheli Wingo-USFWS
Joe Wagenbrenner- Forest Service	Sophie Castleton-Sierra Institute
Jonathan Kusel-Sierra Institute	Steve Buckley-LVNP
Karen Pope-Forest Service	Terri Rust-Plumas Corporation
Kelly Mosinski- LNF	Tracy Schohr-UC Cooperative Extension
Ken Roby-Trout Unlimited	Trish Puterbaugh-Lassen Forest Preservation Grp.
Kevin Sweeney-LVNP	Tuli Potts-SNC
Kirsten Bovee-LNF	Wolfy Rogle -Butte County RCD

**Meeting Opening:**

There were no comments on previous meeting notes. The group entertained a motion to approve the May meeting minutes, and the minutes were approved. The group considered a motion to approve the agenda, and the agenda was approved. SLWG members also introduced themselves and identified their positions and affiliated organizations/agencies.

**Dixie Fire Impacts (Deer Creek Resources, LNF, LVNP, and Collins Pine)**

- Kirsten Bovee and Nick Bunch provided an update from the Lassen National Forest:

- Kirsten shared RAVG imagery, focusing on apparent soil burn severity and basal area loss (an indication of vegetation burn severity). Kirsten highlighted four South Lassen Watersheds Group (SLWG) projects, including Robbers Creek, West Shore, Green Island Lake, and the West Lassen Headwaters Project.
- Half of the 200,000 acres on the Almanor Ranger District experienced 75-100% basal area loss. This will likely result in a high loss of tree canopy cover and tree mortality across the landscape.
- Looking closer at the West Shore (WS) project, there are pockets of high basal area loss. Yet, much of the WS project is outside of the fire perimeter.
- Robbers Creek has some high soil burn severity patches, but the site experienced fairly low-moderate soil burn severity overall. There was also a mix of vegetation burn severity. Meadows were artificially shown as severe.
- Green Island Lake experienced moderate soil burn severity but very high basal area loss.
- The West Lassen Headwaters Project was largely unburned. The areas that did burn (the northeastern corner), including Wild Cattle Mountain, experienced moderate soil burn severity and high basal area loss.
- Nick commented that the rate of fire spread was alarming. Fuels were extremely dry, and the wind was intense. Multiple days had a 100% probability of ignition.
- Going forward, we will likely see some tree mortality even in areas that did not experience canopy fire because trees are stressed from drought conditions. Nick described that even in an area where the Forest Service did prescribed fire treatments that burned at low intensity, they still saw elevated tree mortality due to drought.
- During the Dixie Fire, everything was available to burn because soil moisture was low and fuel moisture content was low. Fire modelers were also struggling to estimate fire growth and spread. We saw a 100,000-acre movement of fire in a day. Pine and fir were burning at rates as though they were a brush fuel type. Lightning storms were also occurring late in the season. The mode of firefighting that we have been practicing is being outpaced. We need to be prepared for another large-scale fire located where the Dixie Fire burned in the next 10-20 years.
- Kevin Sweeney explained some of the impacts in the Lassen Volcanic National Park (LVNP):
- 68% of the Park burned. Some of the Park facilities were damaged. There was a mix of burn severity throughout the Park. Kevin shared images of the landscape that were recently taken in the Park, showing a mosaic burn.
- Kevin showed a Composite Burn Index map. High severity burned areas are concentrated in the southern area where treatments are planned but have yet to occur. The northeastern part of the Park burned less severely.
- Kevin followed the burn severity map with a Fire History Map. There has been extensive prescribed fire in the north and northeastern parts of the Park. Prescribed burning likely helped temper some of the effects of the Dixie Fire. The Park wants to verify the effects of prescribed burning in the coming years.
- The Park is anticipating a fire in approximately 10 years and is hopeful that it will be able to prepare the landscape by returning fire to the area under more favorable conditions. The Manzanita Lake area will be an upcoming priority.
- The Park understands the importance of paying attention to treatment needs in the WUI and how local residents are preparing to live with wildfire. If local residents do not feel safe, they will not support the Park's use of prescribed burning around them.
- RCD of Tehama County received a grant to help prepare Mineral, CA. There is lots of unburned fuel around Mineral.

- Collins Pine land experienced large patches of high severity fire. They expect to see some hydrophobic soils. There is a lot of devastation on the Collins landscape.
- Jonathan asked how soil and vegetation burn severity correlate.
- Nick answered that the two variables are not related. Soil burn severity was likely low because there was lower residence time because the fire moved so quickly. Lower soil burn severity may also be based on soil type.
- Zeke added that when pine needles are left on trees, the soil burn severity is categorized lower. Therefore, the BAER team likely classified the soil burn severity as moderate in areas where brown pine needles are still on the trees.
- Zeke commented on a few notable elements of the fire, and specifically highlighted when the fire crossed Humboldt Rd; the fire made a massive run that took everything west of Chester. This caused the enormous burn scar on Collins Land.
- Zeke also commented on a past firing operation that the Park Service did, which got out of control and became a high severity firing operation (Reading Fire). The Reading Fire Scar may have actually slowed down the Dixie Fire. That firing operation “failure” was a success in tempering a mega-fire.
- Indian Valley got hit hard by the Dixie Fire. It burned 14-year-old plantations in the Moonlight Scar and reburned parts of the Walker Fire that were only two years old.
- Firefighting tactics from the past are not working well. There are many dozer lines in the middle of the Dixie Fire footprint, indicating dozers were not very effective. Zeke recommended being wary of any study that states that logging caused the Dixie Fire or that thinning helped.

## **Post Dixie Fire Work**

### **Reports on Current Action & Projects**

- Bennie updated the group that Collins has started salvage logging and hopes to begin reforestation efforts as soon as possible. Collins would like to get rid of all the dead wood around Chester and plant some green trees. They would also like to begin emergency post-fire restoration work within meadows and streams.
- Sedimentation is a huge concern for many group participants. Unfortunately, there is only so much we can do about erosion before the winter.
- Bennie shared that Child’s Meadow looks beautiful and has mixed fire severity. Dozer lines have unfortunately had a huge impact on the land.
- Steve Buckley described that the Park has its own BAER team. The Park is particularly concerned about invasive plants, especially within the Badger project, due to the lack of weed washes on incident equipment.
- Kirsten described that the BAER process is still ongoing in the National Forest. The Forest is prioritizing suppression repair on firelines and specifically in meadows and fens. They want to address those issues before the rains come.
- Nick added that road systems are critical for containment efforts in the future. The Dixie Fire is highly impacting mills, and we will have a hard time getting logs off the landscape. Our road systems are going to have to be maintained. After the BAER effort, Nick thinks that the Forest needs to look at large-scale NEPA to attempt to return the area to a stable condition. Right now, they are just working on gathering information, and they are reluctant to prescribe some sort of intervention too early.
- Nick feels like we have an opportunity to maintain manageable fuel breaks for future wildfires and managed fire. The majority of impacts have come from bulldozers, and we need to assess which lines are worth keeping to protect future values at risk. We should predetermine what barriers we want to

utilize in the future for fighting fire. Green areas need treatment, and we need access and roads. We will have to decide what we are willing to accept on the landscape as permanent features.

- Zeke agrees that we should be planning for long-term dozer lines. He also thinks it is important to take advantage of this moment to conduct prescribed fire. We could maintain fuels reduction by running prescribed fire into recently burned areas. As a group, we need to think about how we can push to preserve the values that are left. We need to maintain the remaining green areas and look at getting radical with our land management.
- Trish appreciates Zeke's comments. We need to look at management differently. We cannot just do salvage logging and replant. After the Camp Fire we have had two more fires, and we need to figure out where to go from here.
- Peggy asked if salvage wood will become available for firewood. This would be a good way of getting fuel off the land and to people who need it.
- Jonathan mentioned that Sierra Institute is working on getting a mill at the Crescent Mills site; this would help produce materials for rebuilding, firewood, and other community products. SI is actively engaged in conversations about using the Crescent Mills site, especially in response to the fire.
- Kristina McBurney Maahs mentioned that she is concerned about runoff into Lake Almanor. Kristina wonders how the public can get involved and help mitigate the effects of the Dixie Fire. She is worried we will analyze the Dixie Fire all winter but do not do anything specific to respond to the pressing needs. Kristina is wondering what avenues there are for involvement.
- Matt Reno said SPI is trying to be as active as possible. They are prioritizing salvage logging operations but are also trying to balance assessing burned areas and conducting wildfire surveys. This is daunting for everyone. SPI is just trying to take it one step at a time and is doing the best it can.
- Nils added that the Feather River Land Trust (FRLT) are conservation easement holders, and so they are committed to conserving certain values. FRLT is working with the Maidu Summit. Near term, they are also interested in water quality, sediment reduction, and fixing culverts.
- Ken added that because we lost ground cover, there will inevitably be erosion. There is only so much that can be done before the rain comes. Mulching helps, but it is expensive.
- Bennie sees the potential to have sediment help with ecological restoration; not all sediment will be bad. For example, dropping trees in strategic areas in meadows where erosion is happening on streambanks could help sediment get caught and help water reunite with floodplains.
- Jeff said that we should take advantage of the one-time massive sediment pulse. He agrees that we should strategically place trees and other materials in streams to capture sediment in place.
- Wolfy described that the Butte County RCD is working on a project with Jeff at CDFW. Butte County RCD had lots of projects that were just about to start or just got funding. But many projects are stalled right now. She describes Butte County RCD as partners that are in the position to help. She is not sure how to best engage with all the transitions that are happening.
- Coye added that she hopes everyone will bear with the Forest Service. The Forest is just starting to figure out their program of work. There are lots of projects going on, and a lot of balls in the air. Russell will be back in a few months. Please be patient.
- Kristina also added that she knows things are happening. For her, the missing link is letting the general public know what is happening and letting them help. The public wants to do something. She hopes agencies or other landowners will develop some sort of public volunteer efforts and continue to share more information with the public about what is happening.
- Kyle described that this is an opportunity to build partner capacity into the program of work, so we don't hit these lulls in the future. At SI we are researching what a partnership program of work could

look like. We cannot afford to miss three or four months out of every year while FS staff are called away for fires. We need to maintain our momentum.

### **SLWG Project Updates: West Shore, Robbers Creek, West Lassen Headwaters Project**

- Kyle added that we are still in the process of assessing fire effects on the ground.
- The Robbers Creek NEPA decision was signed. We are hopeful that we can still finalize NEPA for the West Shore project as well.
- Coye said that the Forest Service is putting projects into two main buckets--projects that can move forward and projects that require a closer look. Discussions about projects are just beginning. Laura Corral added that the FS may be able to supplement the signed Robbers Creek decision for areas that burned high severity, and the same for West Shore.

### **Objectives and Metrics for ForSys Modeling Efforts (Bella)**

- Bella reminded the group about ForSys modeling, led by Alan Ager at the Rocky Mountain Research Station. In summary, ForSys is a tool that can be used to perform landscape-scale planning and helps the user come up with priority project areas based on desired treatments and landscape conditions.
- Sierra Institute staff have started working alongside Alan Ager, with the help of the South Lassen Watershed Group Strategic Planning Subcommittee, to begin the ForSys modeling process.
- We are working on incorporating the Dixie Fire impacts into the model so we can think about priority post-fire projects and treatments. The model should work as a tool to help us think through where we might want to go next within the SLWG area for a project and what specific treatments would be appropriate there.

### **Partner Updates**

- Ken described that Trout Unlimited is starting to identify priority subwatersheds, and is trying to figure out how to help the Forest Service work on those while also knowing the Forest Service is incredibly busy.
- Zeke mentioned that there is some toxic runoff mitigation happening in Greenville. Volunteers are putting down runoff filters around burned structures and on storm drains to keep toxic heavy metals out of the runoff.
- Kristina heard about a possible transfers station for hazards coming out of Canyon Dam that would be located at Highway 89 and Almanor West Drive. Kristina asked if the Forest Service is considering this location for a transfer station.
- Janie Ackley said the Forest Service has not been approached about the transfer station.

### **Sierra Nevada Conservancy**

- Tuli described that the budget for this year includes about \$50 million available for forest health and fire resilience projects. SNC is rolling some of this funding out as soon as January. There is \$11 million in climate action funding (community vitality, recreation programs, etc.) that should be available mid next year.
- SNC is expanding jurisdiction to include additional regions in Shasta, Siskiyou, and Trinity counties.
- SNC is trying to figure out how to support fire recovery efforts and recognize immediate needs. SNC wants to continue to support partners and efforts on the ground; they are pushing for flexibility in existing pots of money.

- Nils brought up the local housing crisis. He knows a landowner with a beautiful property, who is interested in putting in infrastructure (water, sewer, power) for tiny homes or FEMA trailers. Is there any funding in the near term to improve private lands for the benefit of the community?
- Tuli mentioned that FEMA rolled out a large funding opportunity for California and post-fire recovery. She will dig up info on that.

#### **Maidu Summit Consortium (MSC)**

- No members were present.

#### **Feather River Land Trust**

- Nils updated the group that the ranch in Genesee Valley received a mosaic of fire. The pastures and riparian areas burned extensively. He also recognized the horrible state of Greenville. FRLT is supporting MSC with post-fire assessments. FRLT is particularly concerned about hazard tree removal and how that may harm cultural sites. Many other easements were impacted by the fire as well, and FRLT is trying to do rapid assessments. FRLT has hired a coordinator to help with post-fire work.

#### **Friends of Warner Valley**

- Matt Barton spoke to the group representing Friends of Warner Valley. Warner Valley has over 200 small cabins or homes, much of these are now gone. Friends of Warner Valley is particularly concerned about the degradation of the surrounding environment, including the erosion or avalanches that could come with the winter months. Many families in Warner Valley have been there for 100 years or longer, and residents have a long-term perspective and want to be part of the solution. Friends of Warner Valley would like to work with the SLWG, help the collaborative, and receive the collaborative's support.

#### **Sierra Institute**

- Kyle informed the group that the CCI proposal submitted in May was accepted. It focuses heavily on building workforce capacity; the proposal will need to be slightly altered based on the Dixie Fire.
- SI is also working on engaging with smaller private landowners; SI wants to do better in that area.
- Jonathan also mentioned that Crescent Mills is being considered as a transfer site for post-Dixie Fire materials.

**Adjourn: Next Meeting is on October 26th**