

South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting
Tuesday, October 26th, 2021, 1:00-3:30 pm

Meeting Synopsis:

In the South Lassen Watersheds Group's (SLWG) October meeting, collaborative members listened to updates from Jacob Martin and Doug Peters from the Forest Service about suppression repair efforts. The group then discussed management priorities, especially in response to the Dixie Fire; this included hearing updates from the Park, Collins, the Forest, SPI, and MSC about how their land management priorities are changing post-Dixie Fire. The group then discussed project updates and moving forward with the West Lassen Headwaters Project. The SLWG concluded by hearing from Jonathan Kusel about potential funding from the State to support collaboratives.

Attendees:

Bella Bledsoe-Sierra Institute	Laura Corral-LNF
Bennie Johnson-Collins Pine	Lorena Gorbet-MS
Charlie Chamberlain-USFWS	Mary Davidge-Local Resident
Daniel Kunches- Feather River Land Trust	Matt Barton-Local Resident
Dan Ostmann-LVNP	Peggy Fulder-LAWG
Deb Bumpus -LNF	Phred Starkweather-Local Resident
Doug Peters-LNF	Rob Rianda- RCD of Tehama County
Jake Blaufuss- SPI	Russel Nickerson- LNF
Jake Martin-LNF	Ryan Burnett- Point Blue Conservation Sci.
Janie Ackley-LNF	Sheli Wingo-USFWS
Jim Richardson-LVNP	Sophie Castleton-Sierra Institute
Jim Wilcox- Plumas Corporation	Steve Buckley-LVNP
Jonathan Kusel-Sierra Institute	Thomas Tisch-LAWG
Kelly Mosinski- LNF	Todd Sloat-Fall River RCD
Ken Roby-Trout Unlimited	Tom McCubbins- Tehama County RCD
Kristy Hoffman-SNC	Trish Puterbaugh-Lassen Forest Preservation Grp.
Kyla Sabo-LNF	Tuli Potts-SNC
Kyle Rodgers-Sierra Institute	Wolfy Rougle -Butte County RCD

Meeting Opening:

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

Suppression Repair

- Jake Martin from the Forest described current suppression repair efforts. There are over 1,000 miles of dozer lines and hand lines. Within suppression repair efforts, there are three different priorities.

- Priority 1 repairs have two key factors; they include suppression lines on steep slopes that will receive further damage if they are not repaired before winter, and suppression lines that have natural, cultural, or infrastructure values at risk. There are 19 priority 1 areas within the Dixie Fire West Zone.
- To address those areas, the team creates large boxes or polygons on the map around the priority 1 areas. The team does not try to address everything within the polygon, but they may also address priority 2 areas within those zones.
- Priority 2 repairs include natural, cultural, or infrastructure values that have been damaged. However, they are priority 2 if they will not be further damaged by not addressing the repairs immediately.
- Priority 3 repairs include flat areas and areas where there are no natural, cultural, or infrastructure values at risk.
- Doug Peters spoke to the group about the Forests' BAER program. The BAER team looks at burned areas within the National Forest and assesses these areas for critical values (e.g., human life at risk, Forest Service property, natural and cultural resources). The team just finished their assessment and is waiting to begin implementation.
- The BAER team has worked in three phases. The first phase started with the southwest side of the fire and included about 400,000 acres of the fire footprint. Phase 2 was also about 400,000 acres. The team just finished phase 3, an additional 200,000 acres.
- From there, BAER requests funding to make repairs. Most of the funding will be applied to roads. They also look at wreck sites, botany, and wildlife.
- In total, the BAER team requested 4.3 million dollars. They had an initial request of \$144,000 approved to get the ball rolling and are still waiting for approval of the rest of the funds.
- Once they can get implementation efforts started, they will prepare roads and hazardous sites like burned cabins for higher flows.
- Laura Corral asked if BAER is just on Forest Service property, and Jake answered that it is.
- Jim Richardson added that there is also a separate BAER program responsible for the NPS. Lassen NP will receive around \$1.1 M.
- Jake described that suppression repair is time-constrained. He hopes they will have a couple more weeks to work because there is not much oncoming precipitation right now.
- Deb Bumpus added that suppression repair efforts will close down for the winter, and they will start back up again in late winter or whenever it is dry enough to work.
- Ryan asked if Doug could provide more detail on what actions BAER is going to focus on.
- Doug added that there is no seeding or mulching proposed right now. The team plans on storm-proofing with gravel, removing hazard trees, and containing hazardous sites. In some cases, they have plans to protect endangered plants and species, like the Sierra Nevada yellow legged frog.
- Kristy Hoffman asked where the BAER team will prioritize hazard tree removal.
- Doug answered that they will likely prioritize roadsides and recreation sites.

SLWG Management Priorities

Updates from NPS, Collins, FS, SPI, MSC

- Jonathan started the discussion by asking the group how the SLWG should move forward post Dixie Fire, and how the group's priorities should shift.
- Jim Richardson described how the NPS's priorities are shifting post-Dixie Fire. The Park used the park highway as a fireline. Roughly to the east of the highway was burned, and to the west, it is still green.

There is a large green area that runs adjacent to Mill Creek and Mineral. In general, that area overlaps with the West Lassen Headwaters Project (WLHP). While a portion of the WLHP burned, there is still substantial green area that the Park wants to focus on. The Park is interested in collaborating with the Forest and private partners such as the Battle Creek Mountain Ranch in this area.

- Deb Bumpus spoke about the Forests' main priorities going forward. The Forest is still working on putting timber sales together. They are still doing decking and removing hazard trees. The Forest turned their program of work in for funding two weeks ago. They are planning to review it again on October 27th to see what they need to shift. The Forest is still trying to continue their program to treat green/ unburned areas. They anticipate having difficulty getting wood off of the land because SPI, Collins, and Beaty all lost timberlands, and their mills are full. The Forest is looking at other options for removing wood.
- Bennie Johnson described that going into winter, Collins is working on capturing the value they can from the fire. Finding a place for all this wood is still going to be difficult. Their big-picture goal is still restoration. 54,000 acres of Collins' land burned. They are interested in reforestation, stream restoration, and keeping the green areas green. Reforestation is the number one priority, but they are still considering other things also. Bennie described that around 36,000 acres of their total ownership burned at high severity.
- Jake Blaufuss spoke regarding the procurement and Quincy sawmill part of SPI. SPI is looking at utilizing every piece of timber that they can and then jumping into restoration. If the weather holds, SPI will continue to work through their burned properties. They are still evaluating timber sales (black and green).
- Lorena Gorbet described that MSC's Humbug parcel burned pretty extensively. The Prattville parcel experienced some burning. Benner Creek and Mud Creek also burned. MSC has lots of restoration work that they need to concentrate on. They are also heavily prioritizing site protection and repairing spots where sites were damaged. For now, MSC has put off all other projects. They are doing smaller tasks such as repairing beaver dams at Humbug. The plants that MSC planted at Humbug all burned. However, MSC has 300 oak seedlings ready to go into the ground, and Lorena thinks they can be planted now that it rained and the soil is not hot anymore. The first priority for MSC is site protection and repair.
- Trish wondered about private lands and is curious if any private lands will not be replanted or will just be left alone.
- Jake has not heard that SPI is planning to abandon any land; SPI plans to continue to replant acres that have been burned and that are productive timberlands.
- Collins is also replanting, and Bennie has not heard of abandoning any land either. They may leave some areas as fuel breaks if they are strategically located.
- Kyla said that the Plumas is working with ecologists such as Michelle Coppoletta to see which sites are best suited for replanting, given climate change and other factors. The Forest cannot replant all the acres, so they are trying to determine where replanting will be the most successful.
- Tom McCubbins asked Bennie if Collins is reducing stalking levels to account for climate change.
- Bennie answered that they are considering climate change, but they are still bound by California Forest Practice Rules, which require certain basal areas on the ground.

- Ryan asked if agencies and industry are talking to each other about cumulative watershed effects. Private industry is replanting and reinvesting. Are landowners coordinating with each other, knowing that the federal government is going to go last?
- Russell Nickerson responded that they are in communication with SPI and Collins. The Forest is focused on some of the NEPA that they already have done, so they can move quickly in those areas. Once that has been done, they will take a bigger look at the landscape and assess what can be done.
- Jonathan commented that private entities can get in and capture value before there is no value to be had. Alternatively, federal agencies are required to do a cumulative effects analysis, so they are much slower.
- Ryan sees this as another reason to collaborate. We should be working across boundaries and trying to do this together to decide the highest priority areas.
- Russell reiterated that the Forest is having conversations with other partners, including Caltrans and PG&E.
- Jake added that due to Forest Practice Rules, once an emergency exemption is filed to the State, timber landowners have one year to complete operations. Time is crucial. Ultimately, there is only so much time before timber decays. Further, with an emergency exemption, as opposed to normal Forest Practice Rules, timber landowners have no legal requirement to replant.
- Jonathan added that one value of the group is that it focuses on the landscape. The group does not ignore ownership, but we focus on the large landscape.

Discussion on Group Priorities Post Dixie Fire: How should they shift?

- Lorena stated that MSC is looking at high severity burn areas as the first place to repair. The Dixie Fire opened up the canopy and created fuel reduction. MSC is trying to look at the fire as having some good effect. However, MSC is very concerned with getting dead fuel off the land.
- Lorena also added that priorities can change. Right now, there are families in need. People lost homes. That's how communities work; we must support each other. We need our local communities to have food, firewood, and jobs.
- Ryan added that at the highest level, things have not changed too much. Ryan feels like some good principles to take forward are:
- One, we need to assess the landscape, including through burn severity maps, climate change projections, and other resources to make decisions about how to be strategic going forward. We need to make sure we are working in areas where we are going to have the highest impact.
- Second, WUI is still the highest priority.
- Third, we need to move forward with signed NEPA, like the Robbers Creek project and hopefully the West Shore project.
- Fourth, we have infrastructure needs. There are going to be more soils and sediments moving off the landscape. How do we protect infrastructure resources like roads? How do we ensure the resilience of the remaining green forests?
- High severity fire is important ecologically. We need to decide where to do work, including strategically managing high severity fire areas.
- Ken added that he feels like the shift is obvious. We need to focus on areas affected by the Dixie Fire. We are fortunate that the SLWG is solidified and has been working together for a number of years rather than starting now. We have established relationships we can use.

- We need to move up in size and appreciate that fire now operates at a million acres. We need to include that in our planning and assessments. We need to think at a large scale, but not just spatial scale, but also temporal scale. We need to develop new stream crossings for 100-year events. There is a high probability of another Dixie Fire. We need to factor that into our thinking too.
- We need to push forward with our plans and get fire back into the forests. That has to be our goal. Thinning will not be enough. The tool we need to ramp up is fire. I think we can get funding for this work; capacity is the hindrance. We need to develop ways to help agencies and make their jobs easier, rather than being an impediment.
- Russell added that the Forest is working on supplements for the Robbers Creek NEPA and thinking about finalizing the West Shore project NEPA.
- Jake commented that we need to continue to talk about how we define the WUI. We need to understand why thinning works in some places, and not in others. We need to understand how fire suppression efforts of the Dixie benefited from treatment and thinning. There is a lot of potential to accomplish thinning work, but we need more biomass utilization plants. More plants will increase the ability for land resource managers to get work done.
- Trish asked what does restoration look like?
- Lorena commented that she is not totally sure, but that part of Traditional Ecological Knowledge is getting humans back on the land. It includes us getting out there and doing stuff; it means us trying our best for the land. It is building a relationship with the land, and the land responds to that. It is the idea that you are out there trying and doing something. We need to ask the plants and animals to come back and have faith that they will. Animals and plants need that to regenerate.

SLWG Project Updates

- The Robbers Creek decision was signed, and the Forest is assessing what supplemental analysis is needed.
- West Shore has not been signed yet. Kyle assumes it is in a similar evaluation process.
- We are looking at ways to get the Child's Meadow project back online, even though it is a lower priority for Collins. There were major dozer lines put through the meadow. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to capture sediment in meadows.
- Ryan added that the Rock Creek project is 100% done; that is something to celebrate.
- Kyle showed the rough boundary for the West Lassen Headwaters Project (WLHP). He mentioned that the Strategic Planning Subcommittee still expressed strong support for the project moving forward.
- Sophie described that we are trying to establish planning subgroups (Meadow & Riparian, Upland Forest, Communities & Built Environment, Fire) for the WLHP so that collaborative members can weigh in from the start on the project planning process. Sierra Institute has funding to get this process rolling, and collaborative members can have different levels of involvement. Our goal is to make land managers' jobs easier.
- Bella and Sophie will follow up to get feedback on which of the Planning Subgroups SWLG members want to be involved with, including the option for individuals to not join the Planning Subgroup process.
- Subgroups will convene in February and April. There will likely be another optional third meeting in June.

- The February meeting will focus on collecting and distributing the existing data that we have for the landscape.
- The April meeting will focus on describing desired conditions for the landscape to inform the purpose and need for the project.
- SLWG meetings going forward (March and May) will provide a space for Subgroup members to update the full group on their progress. If group members do not have the capacity right now to join a Planning Subgroup, they can still participate in the planning process during the full group meetings.
- The Landowner Engagement Subcommittee, convening in December, will also occasionally provide updates in full group meetings.
- Kyle added that we are trying to be conscious-- we want to be careful about asking for people's time, but also be inclusive. Discussions in full group meetings will provide an input opportunity that we have not had traditionally during the project planning process.
- Ryan asked if there is bandwidth or interest in pushing the West Lassen Headwaters Project forward.
- Russell added that bandwidth-wise, the Forest is maxed. But there is still a desire to look forward, and see what can be done to move this project forward.
- Mary Davidge added that Warner Valley is not exactly in one of the current project areas. Mary expressed that she is willing to support existing project plans to the best of her ability. It is hard to understand how Warner Valley fits into this work, but residents are anxious to participate and support these efforts at some level.
- Ryan described the importance of thinking about our role, as partners, in this process. How can we help support the Forest Service in planning and implementing post-fire restoration? We need to be having that discussion.
- Kyla described that it is very overwhelming for the Forest Service right now. However, she understands the importance of merging partners and the Forest Service together to create a successful collaboration. The Forest Service needs help. This winter, the FS will better understand what we need and how others can help us. The Forest Service is going to need to let go a bit; we cannot do everything. We have to have trust in our partners.
- Wolfy said that this discussion has been useful to her. The RCD has been planning with Russell for over a year, and about 30% of their project burned in Dixie; 70% did not burn. The RCD wants to make things easier for the Forest and communities. Is it worthwhile to think about pulling existing money together for a restoration EA?
- Kyle added that we have to find a way to do landscape-scale planning in a manner that does not feel intimidating, otherwise it will take too long. He urges the Forest to be candid about how partners can contribute. Advancing this work is challenging and overwhelming, but we need to do it.

Funding from the State

- Jonathan announced the upcoming SCALE meeting on November 3rd and 4th. A major discussion at the meeting will be about getting away from the rat wheel of grants. The state recognizes that there are better, more innovative ways to distribute money to collaboratives and other local entities. A topic for discussion at the upcoming meeting is a possible block grant program. The state wants to know how groups could handle a block grant. If collaboratives are able to get more money, the capacity challenge is only going to become greater. How do we work more effectively together? It is on us to figure out how to support agencies.

Partner Updates

Sierra Nevada Conservancy

- It is great to hear that block grants are being discussed. SNC is releasing new grant guidelines in early December. There will be about \$25 million dollars available in spring, and another \$25 million next summer. There will also be another \$11 million during the summer of 2022 focused on climate resilience, recreation, facilities, land conservation, and so forth.
- SNC is expanding it's jurisdiction to include additional regions in Shasta, Siskiyou, and Trinity counties.

Maidu Summit Consortium

- MSC is seeking funding to hire a Dixie Fire coordinator. The coordinator would oversee MSC's site repairs and other post-Dixie Fire work. That will allow existing staff to go back to the work they were doing.

Lake Almanor Watershed Group

- Peggy highlighted a survey that Bella is going to circulate to the SLWG; filling out the survey and providing your input will assist the Almanor Recreation and Park District (ARPD) in applying for a grant to further improve local recreation opportunities.
- The grant favors creating a greenway park and trail within the first few miles of the 100-ft wide, railroad right of way (ROW). It will allow ARPD to both finalize the acquisition of the entire 12-mile Almanor Rail Trail (R-3) AND to develop the first 1.8 miles of the trail from Westwood's Main Street to the west end of the Causeway. This grant would also permit the renovation of the 100-year-old Railroad Trestle behind Olsen Barn to provide a safe and direct connection to the Causeway and the Olsen Barn property.

Sierra Institute

- Sierra Institute is putting in a sawmill at the Crescent Mills location to process lumber burned in the Dixie Fire. Milled wood will be used to rebuild Greenville. SI is looking at developing cross laminated timber at Crescent Mills. SI hopes to have the mill operational in the next month.
- The SLWG field visit is on November 9th

Friends of Warner Valley (FOWV)

- Friends of Warner Valley is still working on figuring out how they fit into the SLWG. Private landowners in Warner Valley are surrounded by Fish and Wildlife, the Park Service, and the Forest Service. There are several instances where water flows from the Forest Service, to private land, to Fish and Wildlife, and back into private land. FOWV is trying to come together with agencies to work on post-Dixie Fire efforts and develop an integrated plan for the area.

Adjourn

Field Visit to West Shore and Robbers Creek on **November 9th**

Next Meeting is on **December 7th** (due to Thanksgiving)