

South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting
Tuesday, December 7th, 2021, 1:00-3:30 pm

Meeting Synopsis:

In the December South Lassen Watersheds Group meeting, Sophie and Bella provided an update on the interviews conducted with Forest Service professionals and collaborative group members from across the West who have worked on large landscape-scale projects; these interviews were conducted to inform the West Lassen Headwaters Project. The group also brainstormed and discussed the top priorities for the SLWG in 2022. Lastly, Jonathan and Kyle provided an update on the November SLWG field tour, and Sophie gave an update on the next steps for the West Lassen Headwaters Project, going into the New Year.

Attendees:

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| Alyssa Rolan- Mineral Homeowners Association | Matt Barton-Friends of Warner Valley |
| Bella Bledsoe- Sierra Institute | Michael Hall-Feather River Resource Conservation District |
| Bennie Johnson- Collins | Phred Starkweather-Battle Creek Meadows Ranch |
| Dan Ostmann-LVNP | Rob Rianda-RCD of Tehama County |
| Gia Martynn-Plumas Corporation | Ron Lunder-LAWG |
| Jim Richardson- LVNP | Sheli Wingo- USFWS |
| Jo Cunningham-Baccala Ranch | Sophie Castleton-Sierra Institute |
| Jonathan Kusel-Sierra Institute | Spencer Lachman-Sierra Institute |
| Kelly Mosinski-LNF | Tom McCubbins-RCD of Tehama County |
| Kristy Hoffman-SNC | Tom Tisch-LAWG |
| Kyla Sabo-LNF | Trina Cunningham-MSc |
| Kyle Rodgers- Sierra Institute | Trish Puterbaugh-Lassen Forest Preservation Group |
| Larry Rinehart- Mineral Homeowners Association | Tuli Potts-SNC |
| Laura Corral-LNF | Wolfy Rougle-Butte County RCD |
| Lorena Gorbet-MSc | |
| Mary Davidge-Friends of Warner Valley | |

Meeting Opening:

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

Large Landscape-Scale Projects Presentation

- Sophie and Bella gave a presentation on the recent interviews they conducted to learn from other large landscape scale projects to inform the West Lassen Headwaters Project process.
- Interview objectives included: learning techniques to scale up (50,000 ac. +), hearing about creative project designs & NEPA strategies, discussing how to integrate private lands, and learning from other project successes & hiccups.

- The first project was in the Fremont Winema National Forest in Southern Oregon. This project divided a 2.3 million acre Forest into ~100,000-acre sub-projects.
- The Fremont Winema has completed 4 projects, and there are 2 in the planning phase. They used prescribed fire as a blanket treatment for each project. They also completed multiple projects under a Wildlife Categorical Exclusion (CE). This project managed any controversial issues that arose within the collaborative group.
- The second project was in the Mendocino National Forest. 93% of Mendocino Forest burned between 2018 - 2020. The project proposes fire & fuels management on the entire Forest (688,000-acres).
- The project included mechanical treatments in an Alternative, not in the Proposed Action.
- They also did a 60,000-acre pilot area.
- The Mendocino NF project contracted out NEPA & surveys.
- The third project discussed is the East Face in the Willowa-Whitman Forest, Oregon. This project is 50,000-acres and used site-specific NEPA. The collaborative did not help with NEPA in this project, but they were kept informed.
- The fourth project was the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI), in Arizona. This was a collaborative effort to restore portions of four national forests. The 1st of two EISs was signed in 2015.
- The person interviewed from 4FRI articulated that they designed desired conditions for the project in a collaborative workshop.
- They also said NEPA was the “easy” part, and implementation has been a challenge.
- The fifth and final project explored was the Landscape Vegetation Analysis (LaVA) Project in the Medicine Bow National Forest, Wyoming.
- This project originated due to a bark beetle outbreak. The person interviewed heavily emphasized the importance of “Appendix A” which was used to drive condition-based NEPA.
- They also did an interactive story map for ongoing public engagement.
- Given these five projects, Sophie and Bella found that there is no single way to do a large landscape-scale project. The NEPA processes vary.
- However, some of the main takeaways from the conversations include:
 - Keep NEPA simple.
 - Involve the collaborative; there are multiple ways of doing this, including through a desired conditions workshop, building a cross-boundary workforce, etc.
 - Define roles and expectations early.
 - Consider the whole system through implementation.
 - Biomass; workforce. 4FRI particularly struggled with this and expressed the importance of planning for implementation.
 - Condition-based management can allow for flexibility in implementation. Further, all the projects larger than 50,000 acres used condition-based NEPA.
 - Restoration on private and public land can happen separately; they do not have to happen on the same timeline.
 - The SLWG can design its own process based on its collective values and capacity.
- In response to the presentation, Jonathan asked if the group had any questions for Sophie and Bella.
- Mary: What were the central biomass challenges that 4FRI struggled with?
- Bella responded that 4FRI had minimal mill infrastructure locally, and they were trying to develop biomass infrastructure in the area, while also trying to implement their project. They were also trying to

build their workforce during implementation.

- Trish: Did you speak to anyone from the SERAL project, and what is their progress?
- Sophie described that she did speak with a person from YSS, who was assisting with the SERAL project. However, she did not include them in the presentation because they are not as far into the process as some of the other projects included.
- Wolfy: Do the NEPA documents have a timespan attached to them?
- Kyla responded that the Forest tries to avoid putting a time restraint on projects. It just becomes a hindrance.
- Kyle added that there is no perfect roadmap to a large landscape-scale project. Every project has unique circumstances. Rather, we are trying to understand how we draw from the different pieces that were successful that seem like they apply to our situation.
- Wolfy: How do we keep NEPA simple? What does that look like?
- Sophie responded that part of keeping NEPA simple (from the Fremont Winema perspective) is having a streamlined process. Further, all of their projects are similar, mixed conifer projects. They distilled the resources to the bare minimum, in order to streamline NEPA.
- Trish: If you want to streamline NEPA, do you avoid things that could be controversial?
- Kyla said that the Forest Service has avoided controversial areas for the last 15 years. She highly recommends not avoiding issues. Kyla likes the idea of streamlining by not being overly prescriptive. We need to be clear with our purpose and need and objectives upfront. We should not overly hinder ourselves in the NEPA document, more than what the laws and regulations require.
- Jonathan mentioned that the real purpose of this work is to help us make fewer mistakes and move forward more efficiently.
- Kyle added that the LAVA project, in Wyoming, had a large fire that burned through their project last summer. Their NEPA document set them up to respond to something like that.
- Jonathan asked Kyla if the Forest Service has any major concerns about moving forward with this effort?
- Kyla said that the Forest Service understands the importance of this effort; their only concern is workload. She is also interested in knowing how the surveys were accomplished before NEPA for large landscape scale projects.
- Sophie added that surveys were done differently in different projects. Generally, Sophie saw that only a few surveys were prioritized early in the NEPA process. Then, many projects had a pre-implementation checklist from when they were pushing surveys closer to implementation.
- Tom: What management strategies worked for a project this size?
- Sophie said the biggest piece of advice she heard is that everyone cannot do everything. People have to stick to their specialties and not take on too much.

SLWG Project Updates

- Kyle started by sharing a short update on the SLWG November Field Tour. The group stopped at a Collins Pine parcel on the West Shore of Lake Almanor. Neil Fischer talked to the group about how Collins is prioritizing work, and what to cut.
- The group then stopped at another spot on the West Shore. The Forest Service talked about how the Dixie Fire impacted the northern part of the West Shore Project.

- After lunch, the group headed up to the Robbers Creek Project and saw a diversity of burn severity effects.
- Jonathan added how nice it was to be in the field with folks, having conversations about what is going on.
- Jonathan also added a factoid that he had heard from DWR on the field tour. DWR has been watching the hydrograph and seeing it shift. Water flows are extended later into the year in the Feather River Watershed. Jonathan described the importance of not looking at the outcomes from a single project because it is hard to see watershed-wide impacts from a single project. But seeing a shift in the hydrograph shows that these watershed projects from the last 20 years are making an impact. This underscores the success of the work we have been doing.
- Sophie provided a West Lassen Headwaters Project (WLHP) update.
- WLHP Planning Subgroups are established and will meet for the first time in February. Each subgroup has between 8 and 12 participants right now. If you still want to be added to a subgroup (Fire, Communities & Built Environment, Upland Forest, Meadows & Riparian Zones), please contact Bella or Sophie. The February meeting will focus on collecting geospatial data and defining the existing conditions for these four subgroups.
- Tom Mccubbins asked to be added to the upland forest subgroup and the meadow /riparian zone group.
- Laura asked if it was possible to change the project boundary to be a bit larger. Sophie will follow up with Laura to discuss this more.
- Jim specified the importance of the project butting up against the Battle Creek Meadows Ranch.

Looking to 2022

- Jonathan led a group brainstorming session with the guiding questions: what does the SLWG need to accomplish next year? And what are our top two priorities for next year?
- Jonathan added that the region is discussing the possibility of block grants for collaboratives. Block grants would be a way to get more dollars to collaboratives without folks taking more time to write yet another grant proposal.
- Jonathan posed the question: what would the group do with \$10 million or \$15 million? What projects do we need to get done? How do we want to do Dixie Fire recovery? How do we get to pace and scale?
- The group did an exercise and came up with a list of priorities for 2022. The dark purple priority had the highest number of votes, then red, then orange, then yellow, and finally green. The priorities include:
 - **Complete PAPN for the West Lassen Headwaters Project**
 - **Protect the community of Mineral; create a community protection plan**
 - **Find uses for biomass**
 - **Increase the use of prescribed fire**
 - **Create a wholistic Dixie Fire recovery plan**
 - **Protect remaining green stands**
 - **Make a list of priority projects for the South Lassen Watersheds Group**
 - **Create a Partnership Program of Work**
 - **Start reforesting the black (high severity burn areas)**
 - **Emphasize post-fire restoration in meadow and riparian zones**
 - **Identify surveys needs for the West Lassen Headwaters Project**

Humbug Valley project on Lassen National Forest land. They continue planning several meadow restoration projects in the Mountain Meadows basin on private lands owned by SPI and the Walker Family (managed by Beaty and Associates). They also are continuing their 20+ year collection of streamflow data in the watershed.

Friends of Warner Valley

- No explicit updates. Many Warner Valley neighbors are trying to figure out what to do with debris on their land, and how to move forward with rebuilding.

Butte County RCD

- Butte County RCD is kicking off a new collaboration with the Lassen National Forest. Wolfy hopes to get a project boundary solidified in the upcoming ID Team meeting.

Feather River RCD:

- Feather River RCD is having some discussions about reforestation and planting efforts. They are developing a new project, in partnership with SI, MSC, NRSC, and Plumas Firesafe, to get trees back into the ground. This would be a pilot program, and they are looking to hit 2500 acres over three years.

RCD of Tehama County:

- Tom said the RCD is working on the Childs Meadow Restoration Project; they are working with Collins, Point Blue, and UC Davis on that effort.

Sierra Institute:

- SI is working on a forester project funded by CalFire. We are working with a number of folks on this call to sort through how to actualize a funded project. The project will fund four forester positions, one at Tehama RCD, one at Butte RCD, one at Collins, and one at SI. SI is looking forward to working on this more.
- SI is almost finished with the sawmill at Crescent Mills; it is close to fully operational. J&C Enterprises is leasing it. The goal is to take burned timber from the Dixie Fire and use it to reconstruct homes.

Adjourn

Next Meeting is on **January 25th**