



South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting Tuesday, January 25th, 2021, 1:00-3:30 pm

Meeting Synopsis:

In the January South Lassen Watersheds Group meeting, the Butte County RCD and RCD of Tehama County provided updates on two developing projects within the SLWG collaborative footprint. After those updates, Alan Ager from the Rocky Mountain Research Station discussed the preliminary, coarse outputs from ForSys, and talked about how the collaborative can continue to develop more nuanced and meaningful scenarios. The meeting concluded with a discussion of evolving statewide forest collaborative efforts, including updates from the Sierra Institute on the Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement (SCALE) project and Devin Landry on the California Landscape Stewardship Network.

Attendees:

Alan Ager: Rocky Mountain Research Station
Amye Osti: 34 North
Bella Bledsoe: Sierra Institute
Bennie Johnson- Collins
Caden Chamberlain: University of Washington
Cameron Musser: Butte County RCD
Chris Wagoner: RCD of Tehama County
Corrinne Scieszka: Sierra Institute
Dan Ostmann: LVNP
Devin Landry: California Landscape Stewardship Network
Gia Martynn: Plumas Corporation
Hannah Redford: University of Washington
Jacob Potter-: Feather River RCD
Jake Blaufuss: SPI
Jim Richardson: LVNP
Jonathan Kusel- Sierra Institute
Ken Roby: Trout Unlimited
Kristy Hoffman-SNC
Kyle Rodgers: Sierra Institute
Larry Rinehart- Mineral Homeowners Association

Laura Corral-LNF
Lorena Gorbet-MS
Mary Davidge-Friends of Warner Valley
Matt Barton-Friends of Warner Valley
Michelle Day: Rocky Mountain Research Station
Peggy Fulder: LAWG
Phred Starkweather-Battle Creek Meadows Ranch
Ron Lunder: LAWG
Ryan Burnett- Point Blue
Sherrie Thrall: Plumas County Board of Supervisors
Sophie Castleton: Sierra Institute
Spencer Lachman: Sierra Institute
Steve Buckley: NPS
Thomas Tisch: LAWG
Tom Mccubbins: RCD of Tehama County
Trish Puterbaugh-Lassen Forest Preservation Group
Tuli Potts: SNC
Wolfy Rougle: Butte County RCD

Meeting Opening:

There were no comments on previous meeting notes. The group entertained a motion to approve the December 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.

Updates on Projects Within the SLWG Collaborative Footprint

Upper Butte Creek Forest Health Initiative

- The Upper Butte Creek Forest Health Initiative covers the last remaining green forest in Butte County and is within the Almanor Ranger District. Butte County RCD is excited to work with the Forest Service in the green forest. The project will include an EA for about 18,000 acres.
- The project also allows a condition-based approach to NEPA, which is particularly important because conditions change unpredictably in these areas. The condition-based approach will allow the Forest to do on-the-ground verification right before implementation. Forest health actions will likely include thinning and prescribed fire.
- The project will focus on doing what needs to be done, not just what is easiest. The area has spotted owls, goshawks, frogs, and martens; the project has a strong wildlife focus.
- The ID Team is currently forming and working on their Project Initiation Letter.
- Kyle Rodgers asked if there are any specific ways the South Lassen Watersheds Group might interact with this project as it moves forward. How can the group get involved?
- Wolfy answered that she thinks they will have a better idea by the next meeting in March. At that point, they will likely have reports back from the Foresters and the Silv Teams; that should give some idea of the treatments that will probably be most important in the project area. The team has stand exams planned for spring and summer, but they are not expecting to roll into full scoping until Spring 2023. Wolfy said that they are open to input and suggestions about how the group wants information about the project as it develops.

RCD of Tehama County's Mineral Project

- RCD of Tehama County is removing 752 trees in the Mineral area, both dead and alive. The RCD is coming up with a more concrete plan and should have more details this spring.
- Trish asked who the lead on the project is. Does it include NEPA? Is it similar to the West Shore project?
- Kyle added that the project will exclusively focus on private lands, focusing on valuable infrastructure and defensible space work. The goal is to protect communities in general.
- The RCD plans to put together an Advisory Committee to help solidify some of the details; that initial meeting will likely be in February or March.
- Kyle mentioned that the Cal Fire funding awarded in early fall was in part to fund additional positions at the Butte County RCD, RCD of Tehama County, Collins, and Sierra Institute to provide extra capacity to move forward collaborative projects like the ones just described. We are excited about looking for ways we can leverage those individuals to bring collaborative projects more cohesively together. It will allow all of us to move projects forward more quickly.

Initial ForSys Outputs and Building New Scenarios

- Alan Ager started by providing some background to the group. ForSys was designed as a planning tool to help with illustrating trade-offs and predicting outcomes, to make prioritization work more effective. The goal is to help agencies be more efficient in investing in projects.
- The Forest Service has dozens of assessments--hazard assessments, watershed assessments, wildfire risk assessments. But using those to actually prioritize work and predict outcomes is challenging. ForSys, therefore, ingests these assessments and the Forest Service's objectives, and uses them to help agencies make choices and plans.

- ForSys allows the user to develop meaningful planning areas (e.g., watersheds, firesheds). Then, the user can define objectives for those planning areas, as well as targets they want to reach (e.g., areas treated, wildfire risk reduction). ForSys then spits out scenarios that prioritize the planning areas based on the objectives and desired targets.
- Alan provided a few case study examples of the model to the group, including the Blue Mountain National Forest. The Blue Mountain National Forest wanted to look at the tradeoff between protecting the WUI, and timber outputs. The Forest was interested in optimizing timber production where possible and achieving both outcomes. ForSys helped them see which scenarios allowed them to accomplish both goals. The goal was to find hotspots for WUI protection that also coincide with hotspots for commercial timber volume.
- Alan showed the group a couple of graphs showing cumulative revenue and total acres treated in the Blue Mountain National Forest. He pointed out the revenue peak, which indicates the point where the Forest has run out of areas with positive revenues.
- Alan described that his team had run some simple scenarios for the South Lassen Watersheds Group. Alan is working with Amye Osti to correct some of the data issues that came up when running these initial scenarios. Once the data issues are fixed, the SLWG can run some more complex scenarios.
- Ken asked if Alan had done any case studies that considered any other economies or sources of revenue besides timber, such as recreation?
- Alan said they had not; it can be challenging to quantify and measure economic outcomes. Timber revenue is fairly straightforward to calculate; it is essentially just the value of the logs minus transportation and logging costs.
- Jonathan added that the mills are full; some timber does not have any value at all. How do we account for the abundance of dead trees in the model?
- Alan responded that there are economists that could try to predict how supply and demand may predict prices, but that is not inherently worked into the model's outputs.
- Phred asked if the model could be used to look at a finer scale (not watersheds, but much smaller pieces of land).
- Alan said the model can apply to smaller scales if there is the appropriate geospatial data. The model can look at individual trees if the data exists. Typically, it looks at a decision unit between 5 and 40 acres.
- Jake mentioned that he sees the value in the Forest and private landowners taking advantage of the green. After a couple of years, the black timber will no longer be usable, and the demand for the green market will make it possible to get large-scale green projects accomplished.
- Wolfy asked if the model could be used for the Upper Butte Creek Project. At what landscape or scale is this tool most useful? Is there a scale at which the model becomes less valuable?
- Alan answered that the model is best used when there is some sort of conflict or a question of what to do on the land. The model is meant to help with unknowns or a problem. The model helps users think through the best way forward, and that can be true at any scale.
- Ryan commented that there are plenty of unknowns or problems in light of the Dixie Fire. We cannot get all the black wood out of the forest; we cannot get it all to the mill. How do we prioritize both ecological and economic needs? We need a strategy. Collins seems like it has started close to the mill and is working its way out. We will have to make some tough choices, and we are already confronting these problems and making tradeoffs. The model could be helpful in thinking through some of this.

- Amye added that Michelle Coppoletta's post-Dixie Fire assessment will be available soon as well, and adding this data into ForSys will assist in creating more accurate, meaningful scenarios for the SLWG.
- Jim added that ForSys modeling may work well for the West Lassen Headwaters Project (WLHP). We could take the objective of protecting the WUI and balance this objective against the other proposed landscape objectives. It could help us sequence and prioritize our implementation work as well, especially given that implementation is going to happen over a long period of time. Solid plans help us get funding.
- Larry expressed that he is interested in understanding what treatments were effective during the Dixie Fire.
- Alan responded that he knows people are going to study that. People study fires every year to ask those types of questions and try to further understand what kind of treatments are effective at reducing the negative impacts of fires. There is a study of the Camp Fire that just came out.
- Jonathan asked for comment on how the Lassen NF might integrate ForSys. Or is it too soon to say?
- Laura is interested in seeing what data has been collected for WLHP and if there is sufficient data to run ForSys for the project area.
- Amye is just wrapping up a big data dictionary and thinks there will be good data for the WLHP area.
- Sophie asked what kind of technical expertise is needed to run the model? What kind of people would we need?
- Alan responded that most of the work is developing landscape objectives, treatment, and constraints to build scenarios. Running the model is the easy work. The hard part is defining the problem and building the scenarios. Pulling the data together can be challenging as well. The data and the problems have to be well-defined.
- Alan expressed that his team is still interested in working with the SLWG to run scenarios. Their program is evolving, and every study area and problem helps refine the model.
- Amye ended by saying that we have a good data dictionary to draw from and play with. The SLWG can use it to think through how it might phase or prioritize implementation of the WLHP. The group will have to make hard choices about treatments and the risks they are willing to accept. How do these things affect cost or speed?

SLWG Project Updates

West Shore Project & Robbers Creek Project

- The decision was signed on the West Shore Project. The West Shore Project was one of the two initial projects for the group, piloting collaborative engagement.
- Laura is working on the Supplemental Report (SIR) and will check if that can be public.
- Collins is doing site prep on their West Shore parcels, and once there is a break in the weather, they will get equipment out to restart operations. Collins is actively pursuing every grant opportunity they can for seedlings, planting, and herbicides. The West Shore area is first priority, and the area immediately around Chester is a high priority also.
- There have been a few Robbers Creek IDT meetings to get the project back to shovel-ready. They are redrawing some goshawk PACs, and Laura and the FS are working on redelimiting where they might change treatments. Those discussions will inform the SIR for Robbers. They plan to start implementation on the meadows this fall and winter.
- Jake asked if either of the projects would have any contracts?

- Laura said that she is not sure at this time.
- Jonathan asked if SPI is even looking to secure any contracts?
- Jake said that the Quincy division is purchasing from the Plumas National Forest right now. Of course, SPI will be working on SPI salvage, but they are still buying burned timber from private landowners. They do not have much ability to purchase, but there's a chance that these projects could make their species composition at the sawmill more ideal. Right now, SPI is not getting all they want to make the mills profitable. Collins Pine may be in the same situation too. Also, they have 1.5 years of decent wood, but in 2023 they will be looking heavily at everything.

West Lassen Headwaters Project

- Sierra Institute is going to start convening our four collaborative planning subgroups. There will be one workshop per week in the month of February. Workshops will focus on existing conditions, and familiarizing ourselves with the landscape. This work will directly inform the Purpose and Need for the project.
- We are also having our first IDT meeting in mid-February. The meeting will focus on developing a strategy for data collection and the Project Initiation Letter.
- The Landowner Engagement Subcommittee provided a short update on their recent December meeting. There were 15 attendees representing different types of landowners, including homeowners associations, ranches, and small private landowners. Many were from within the WLHP boundary, but not all. Everyone had a different experience with the Dixie Fire; some experienced no impact, while others lost homes. There was also a range of familiarity with current forest management practices; for example, several larger ranches have engaged in thinning in the past.
- The group is planning on quarterly meetings, and the next one is in March. The goal for the group is to network with other landowners, learn about landowner assistance programs, and stay up to date on the WLHP planning process. Group members also hope to hear more about agency's post-Dixie Fire plans.
- Jim added that each individual landowner has their own concerns and priorities, including everything from post-Dixie Fire restoration to fire prevention. The secret will be our collaboration.

Statewide Forest Collaborative Efforts

SCALE

- Corrinne described that the *Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement (SCALE)* project is a peer learning network of collaborations across California. During the most recent meeting, there was extensive discussion about how we support collaboratives as partners, and how the state can better support the work of collaboratives. One of the outcomes of the last meeting was the development of a document of recommendations. The document is essentially a blueprint for state and legislative officials on supporting collaboratives. Some of the topics include moving towards block grant funding, accelerating the removal of woody biomass, and resolving regulatory issues. Sierra Institute is hoping to have a finalized version soon; the document is an advocacy tool for collaborative groups.
- Developing block grant programs would allow collaboratives not to have to continue on the rat wheel of grant cycles and constant proposals and just focus on their work.

California Landscape Stewardship Network

- Devin provided some background on the CLSN. This is a volunteer-led network of networks. It started with 6 regional networks, and has turned into a network of collaboratives focused on having localized, statewide, and national level conversations.

- Right now, the CLSN is interested in learning how capacity plays out on the ground. They are going to put out a survey to collaboratives to ask questions like, what capacity do you have and what needs do you have, and try to continue to elevate the conversation. The CLSN is also excited about the idea of getting out of the grant-funded work cycle that is too project-specific, and use block grants to think at the landscape level.
- Devin's main purpose was to introduce himself and let everyone know that he is interested in supporting groups like the SLWG.

Partner Updates

Sierra Nevada Conservancy

- Tuli updated the group that SNC is wrapping up the Forest Health grant program; they are still taking new applications until the end of January. There will be a similar program in June or July.
- The Recreation and Tourism grant program will be rolling out soon.
- The SNC WIP Summit is coming up on March 2nd. Wildfire recovery will be the main topic, but there is no finalized agenda yet.

Maidu Summit Consortium

- MSC is working on getting back on track. They are opening their campground in May and preparing by taking down hazard trees and putting in new bathrooms. MSC is having to put their trail system work on hold, due to hazard tree removal and fire restoration work taking priority.
- MSC is moving ahead with replanting, and getting oak seedlings in the ground that did not get planted last year. They still have plans for an oak savannah, where the Chips Fire burned.
- MSC is also working on providing monitors along the highways, to provide assistance to FEMA and Cal OES while they are doing cleanup work.

Sierra Institute

- Through the High Roads Training Partnership grant, SI is helping to support some folks from MSC, Greenville Rancheria, and others to participate in the Hazwoper training, which is a training to help folks work safely in hazardous waste removal scenarios.
- SI is excited about the new mill at Crescent Mills. We are planning on an upcoming ribbon-cutting ceremony in the spring. We are working with Cal OES and CalTrans to send logs to Crescent Mills, especially off of the Greenville grade.

Others?

- Plumas Corps update from the Zoom chat: We completed the Tributary Reach project (trib to Yellow Crk) in Upper Humbug Valley on Lassen National Forest in December. Completed additional work on structures in Rock Creek in December, as well. Continue planning efforts for two large meadow restoration projects in the Mountain Meadows Basin north of Westwood on private lands.
- The Lassen National Park received 1.1 million in BAER funding, and have been approved for 5.1 million in disaster supplement funding. This is a big deal for the Park and sets them up well for fire recovery efforts.
- Matt asked if there is an expectation of how/where the Park's fire recovery money gets applied.
- Jim answered that the Park requested money for specific things. These things were vetted by subject matter experts while the Dixie Fire was still burning, and came out in the Park's BAER report. They have some wiggle room and could apply for more money. They are planning to rebuild a bunch of bridges, and for example, if they rebuild a bridge, and it costs more, the Park can ask for more money.

- They are not expecting to replant or do erosion work where there were no impacts from fire suppression.
- Matt asked about how the Park plans to address the trail system.
- Jim said the Park plans to work on the trail system with this funding by doing trail recovery and repair work. Full recovery could take about three years.
- Ryan B updated the group that they are doing a restoration project at Child's Meadow. They are hoping for it to be shovel-ready soon and hope to initiate implementation in the fall.
- Laura informed the group that they could submit a FOIA request to get access to the project SIRs for West Shore and Robbers from Kathleen Moore.

Adjourn

Next Meeting is on **March 29th**