

South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting
Tuesday, September 20th, 2022, 1:00-3:30 pm

Meeting Synopsis:

In the September South Lassen Watersheds Group (SLWG) meeting, the collaborative heard updates on the West Lassen Headwaters Project (WLHP) planning process and the timeline for the PAPN. After that, the group heard an update about West Shore and Robbers Creek implementation and discussed an implementation tracking process for the WLHP. The meeting concluded with updates from the Lassen National Forest (LNF), the Lassen Volcanic National Park (LAVO), and other land managers on post-Dixie Fire work, and the group discussed how the collaborative wants to contribute to post-fire work.

Attendees:

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| Anna Schrenk: LAVO | Kristy Hoffman: SNC |
| Barbara Andrews: Silver Lake Homeowners | Kyle Rodgers: Sierra Institute |
| Bella Bledsoe: Sierra Institute | Mary Davidge: Friends of Warner Valley |
| Bennie Johnson: Collins Pine | Matt Barton: Friends of Warner Valley |
| Dan Ostmann: LAVO | Rebekah Casey: Butte County Fire Safe Council |
| Doug Peters: LNF | Ron Lunder: LAWG |
| Faith Churchill: Butte County RCD | Russell Nickerson: LNF |
| Helen Leiser: Collins Pine | Ryan Burnett: Point Blue Conservation Science |
| Holly Swan: Cal Trout | Sophie Castleton: Sierra Institute |
| Jake Blaufuss: SPI | Taylor Nilsson: Butte County Fire Safe Council |
| Jim Richardson: LAVO | Thomas Tisch: LAWG |
| Jonathan Kusel: Sierra Institute | Trey Hiller: Battle Creek Watershed Conservancy |
| Kathryn Raeder: RCD of Tehama County | Tuli Potts: SNC |
| Kelly Mosinski: LNF | Wolfy Rougle: Butte County RCD |

Meeting Opening:

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

West Lassen Headwaters Project: Planning Process

- Sophie provided an update on the Proposed Action timeline for the West Lassen Headwaters Project (WLHP). The ID Team, made up of Forest Service staff, Lassen National Park staff, and Sierra Institute (SI) staff, is moving forward with the federal environmental compliance process.
- SI hosted two Proposed Action workshops for the collaborative group in August. Sierra Institute is now working on synthesizing the outcomes from all three workshops (existing conditions, desired conditions, and proposed actions). SI will share the synthesized outcomes with the ID Team in October for the Proposed Action Purpose and Need (PAPN) development. Our goal is to have a draft PAPN by the end of February.

- We want to give the SLWG an opportunity to review the draft PAPN, probably in early January. This will be a chance to give feedback to the ID Team before they make a finalized document.
- The ID Team has had three field meetings, all in different portions of the project area; the goal has been to familiarize ourselves with the landscape and talk about different elements of the project area. The next six months will be devoted to writing.
- Mary commented that, as a resident, she is anxious to see how this all comes together. She commented that she does not have a science background, so the workshops have been a huge learning process. The collaborative effort has been fascinating to see.
- Russell commented that the workshops have been really helpful for getting a public perspective.

Project Implementation Updates

- Sophie and Kyle shared an update on West Shore and Robbers Creek project implementation.
- Both projects were affected by the Dixie Fire to various degrees. This summer at Robbers Creek, we tried to focus on some of the actions that were time-sensitive post-fire. We all worked closely with Ryan Burnett at Point Blue to identify places where the project had envisioned aspen enhancement. We wanted to capitalize on areas that burned and had been “reset.” We do not need to operate in those areas after all because a lot of the overstory has been killed by the fire. In the fall, we are hoping to do hydrologic work at Swain Meadow. We also hope to put in some Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs). We will install some of these this fall with the students and teachers restoring a watershed (STRAW) program. Westwood and Chester schools will help build the BDAs in Swain Meadow.
- At West Shore, crews have been marking this summer. We are also going to see some implementation of some of the hand thinning in the next few weeks. The FS is also working on a service contract for areas burned at high severity.
- Jake asked if the portions of Robbers and West Shore that burned at high severity are being excluded from the project.
- Kyle answered that they have not been excluded from the project boundary, and those areas have their own service contract. They have been modified to a different prescription but have not been taken out of the NEPA. The goal is to salvage and reforest about 800 acres at Robbers.
- Jake asked what is the follow-up plan to treat the fuels in these project areas if no one will buy the logs.
- Kyle responded that is the goal of the service contract. Service contracts will ensure that fuel reduction happens in these areas, even if we cannot find a buyer for the logs. Our goal is to get materials from the Dixie Fire down and decked as soon as possible. We will deal with the material as we move forward.
- Jake said he is glad to hear things will move forward even if the logs cannot be sold.
- Jake asked if there is going to be timber sale contracts.
- Russell responded that he is not sure yet; so far, they have only done service contracts.
- Kyle then shared an example document he came across from 4FRI that he thought the group could possibly use for tracking implementation for the WLHP. It would help set the group up to track, share, and communicate in the future. It would also help us hold ourselves accountable to timelines. The 4FRI example shows a bunch of different tracking options, including tables that show the sales that got awarded, how many acres the sales are, who bought it, and the number of acres that remain to be cut.

- Ryan agrees that a table like this would be useful. That would help him track when a contract goes out, the number of acres, and the progress on the contract. It will also help us discuss what is happening when progress is not being made on a contract.
- Kyle also added that the sheet would help us track prescribed fire, non-commercial activities, and any other actions we want to track.
- Wolfy asked if it would be possible to make the tracking sheet into a map.
- Kyle said he thinks it is possible and there is usefulness for both a table and a map. A table may be able to have a bit more info, but a map could help show implementation visually to the public.
- Ryan also mentioned that the trackers could include work on private lands also, which may not be in a grant we are all doing together. It would be useful to see the types of work happening on private lands.
- Jake said he would have to ask about sharing progress maps publicly.
- Bennie said she could also ask and see if Collins would be comfortable with sharing that type of information with the public.
- Jonathan added that tabular data is easier to manage and mapping is a bit more involved. He thinks there is value in the collaborative sharing information, with the goal of managing a collaborative landscape. We should be able to work together with some common basis of understanding of both needs and conditions. That type of data will help us be thoughtful in talking about a multijurisdictional landscape.
- Kyle said we will try to pull together a template based on tracking existing smaller projects. That will give us a feel for how much effort it is going to be, and if people like it, we can scale up to WLHP.

Post Dixie Fire Updates

- Russell provided a Post Dixie Fire update for the Lassen National Forest. He commented that Jake Martin is the restoration lead on the Forest right now. The regional office is in the process of doing a post-disturbance hazard tree maintenance project. All of the Lassen National Forest roads in the Dixie Fire footprint are included in the planning effort; this includes approximately 893 miles of road. We expect a decision for the Hazard Tree Removal project at the beginning of December. The objection period is through the end of November. The Lassen is also moving forward on a project--the Zoombug project. This project is along Humbug Rd and will work on clearing trees on 150 ft on each side of the road.
- Dixie Fire suppression repair contracting is also moving forward. There are hundreds of miles of suppression lines, and some have not been repaired or have a huge fuel loading on them. The FS is working on going back to those areas and cleaning up trees on fire lines.
- The Forest is also planning a Dixie Community Protection project focusing on communities and defensible space. This project encompasses all communities, buffers them, and will remove hazardous trees, do site prep, and initiate some reforestation.
- Barbara commented that there is an amazing amount of beetles in severely burned areas. How are they affecting some of this cleanup? Are they having an impact on some of the restoration projects?
- Russell said the beetles are not directly having an impact. However, beetles do impact what we can do with that material. If the material is still valuable, it can go to the sawmills. But if not, the material will need to be chipped, burned, or dealt with some other way.

- Jake commented that we have about a year for the saw log material before there is a lot of beetle activity. SPI is trying to get the wood out as quickly as possible. If it gets too dry, the wood starts to split apart. Beetles are just one element of deterioration. The log has to be 25% sound to go to the mill.
- Barbara asked if winter snows will slow things down.
- Jake said it will slow things down some.
- Matt asked a question about the R5 hazard tree removal project. How is the FS going to prioritize treatments within the very large footprint? Also, is there any update on which communities will be prioritized within the community project?
- Russell responded that as a Forest, they are going to evaluate a system of roads. They will generally be looking around communities first and at heavily used areas and roadways. Each district in the Forest is going to have a set of roads that they start moving forward with. There is room for input to be given. Russell feels input would be helpful to the Forest.
- The Community Protection project will include all communities in the Dixie Fire footprint--Chester, Westwood, Warner Valley, etc. The rest of the Dixie Fire footprint, outside of the communities, also will have NEPA to do clean-up work and preparation for restoration or the other actions that may be needed.
- Doug provided a BAER update for the Forest Service. Doug reminded the group that this work is focused on Forest Service values at risk that need to be protected from threats such as runoff after a fire. The bulk of the work ends up being around roads, such as roads that are in danger of blowing out. There is a lot of road mitigation work to do. Work has to be done within one year of containment, which is October 26th. Weed problems are also a focus after a fire, as well as hazard trees in recreation areas. The Lassen is struggling to get a contractor to do the trails work. In addition to BAER, the Forest also has BAR, which stands for Burned Area Restoration. That funding will help restore burned facilities, such as burned picnic tables or restrooms. The Forest has three years to do BAR and has been prioritizing BAER because it has to be completed in a year.
- Anna Schrenk provided the BAER update for the Park. The Park is doing about 16 emergency stabilization treatments, and they received about \$1.2 million for the work. The Park got an extension to complete BAER. The Park also received some BAR funding.
- At the Park, a biologist did hazard tree surveys and identified 4,000 hazard trees. The Park will concentrate efforts on roadsides, around campgrounds, and around ranger stations. The Park is also just about to finalize an inter-agency agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and is working with Mooretown Rancheria to do some of the work. Mooretown will do work on Warner Valley Road, Drakesbad, and on highway 89. Some of the debris from the felling will be piled and burned, some will be chipped, and some will be left on the ground. Lots of the debris will be decked, and the Park is hoping to put out a GSA Timber Sale next spring (2023). Priorities for next summer (2023) will be Juniper Lake road. The Park is working on culvert replacements, building bridges and boardwalks that burned, and stabilizing sites until they can get in and assess those sites. They have also been hiring interpretive rangers to communicate with visitors about post-fire hazards. Also, on the NPS boundary, they are replacing signage and fencing. Invasive species crews are surveying hand lines and dozer lines. Some ecological monitoring has also burned, including trail cameras, etc. Equipment is being replaced.
- Bennie updated the group that Collins Pine Company is clearing and logging land and then replanting. They plan to work until the snow does not allow anymore. Next year will be much of the same.

- Jake said SPI is also focused on salvage and reforestation. They are almost 50% of the way through salvage and prepping for replanting. The log quality has been decreasing. SPI won't start replanting until next year. Replanting crews are concentrated on the North Complex, and work on that is going well. Trees are getting into the ground. Trees will be going into the ground around Chester next year. SPI mills are moving wood all around to try and accommodate all the burned wood. The main takeaway is that the Dixie Fire affected big portions of SPI land. The sustained yield is about the same, but it is just spread out differently. SPI has the benefit of being able to move wood around, and that helps accommodate catastrophes. SPI is replanting at 14 x 14 spacing, sometimes even 16 x 16, instead of the usual 10 x 10. This should eliminate the pre-commercial thin.
- Mary commented that some people in Warner Valley are worried about the salvage work. She asked who they can speak with about the concern. Jake said he will get in touch with Mary.
- Jake highlighted that one of his biggest takeaways is the large patch sizes created by the Dixie. Some of these areas may not become forests again without restoration activities because there is no seed source. Plus, if these areas reburn again, it could ruin the soil layer and sterilize the soil. These areas need restoration support.
- Doug added that many fire scars do reburn. The Moonlight Fire scar and the Chips Fire scar reburned in the Dixie, and where there were logs lying on the ground, they burned for a long time, and deep into the soil. Those types of reburns are a concern. If we cannot get material out of the woods, the scale of soil damage that results from reburns will be higher. BAER was developed when fires were 30,00 acres. The one-year constraints are not realistic for the fire sizes we are getting today. We cannot do 1 million acres of fire restoration in a year. It is not practical.
- Ryan commented that with the scale of recent fires, we need a totally different response. We have to make decisions about where we are going to live with what, knowing we will have more Chaparral. We cannot restore it all.
- Kyle asked if the BAER process looks at values at risk on private lands just abutting Forest Service lands. For example, there is a risk of culvert failure on FS land, but the value is on the neighboring private land.
- Russell responded that those values are captured. However, with fires being so large, the challenge is addressing every single issue.
- Jonathan added that he understands the need to prioritize, given that we cannot treat every acre. Where are those decisions being made? Is there a role for the collaborative in making those decisions?
- Jake replied that SPI's primary concern is SPI lands, but they are also trying to help out where possible. SPI is giving priority to MSC right now, and he thinks other log sales are possible as well. SPI is working to be creative in how they support small landowners and the Forest Service.
- From the FS standpoint, there is not a lot of room for input on BAER, but there will be room for input on the restoration efforts moving forward.
- Jonathan asked, how do agencies build their capacity as they do emergency response work? If a single contractor can get a whole contract, it does not necessarily lead to more local capacity to do work in the future. We need to build capacity as we go. I think there is a role for the collaborative in strategizing and prioritizing. We need to tap into local expertise and simultaneously build the capacity of the workforce to do the work that is needed over time.
- Russell said the FS has some restrictions about how they can award contracts. Jonathan and Russell will follow up about this to see if there is any way to help local contractors get more contracts.

- Tom thinks that we need to find a way to communicate this information to the public, much better than we do now. If I was not part of this group, I would be clueless about understanding the complexity and progress of what is happening. There might be a role for the collaborative in shifting policy around the one-year time constraint of BAER. We should be trying to relieve some of these constraints.
- Ryan added that he agrees and thinks there is value in identifying systematic barriers. There is a lot of promise in moving forward, but we are going to have to change. We have to do more landscape-level treatments using fire.

Collaborative Process

- Bella and Jonathan proposed that the SLWG move forward with meeting in person twice per year and hosting four virtual meetings, totaling six meetings per year.
- Jake commented that he thinks that format makes sense and that field tours are useful for the group when possible.
- The group supported the proposal of doing two in-person meetings a year and four virtual meetings; in-person meetings may include field tours.

Partner Updates

- **Butte County RCD:** Wolfy shared with the group that they are having a field tour focused on the Upper Butte Creek project that is open to the public on October 17th; she will follow up with further information.
- **Sierra Nevada Conservancy:** SNC received 59 concept proposals for the Wildfire Recovery and Forest Resilience request for proposals. This totaled \$89 million, and SNC has \$36 million available total. SNC is in the process of doing site visits; only implementation projects receive site visits.
- **Sierra Institute:** Jonathan updated the group that SI is in negotiations with Chico State to do a joint CERF effort focused on community economic development. SI was selected because of collaboratives like this, which are focused on landscape restoration and incorporate wood utilization. We are confident that SI and Chico State can pull it off. SI is also submitting a Regional Climate Collaborative (RCC) proposal, and we will be reaching out to folks to ask for partnership support and engagement.
- **Greater Battle Creek Watershed Working Group:** Trey updated the group that on Tuesday, November 15th is a GBCWWG quarterly meeting. The primary topic will be FERC's recent request that PG&E submit a plan and schedule for decommissioning and surrendering the Battle Creek hydroelectric project. This development creates extraordinary opportunities and challenges for the watershed. The GBCWWG will work together to develop a mutual understanding of the FERC decommissioning & surrender process, the exact extent and details of the surrender of the PG&E Battle Creek Hydro system, as well as the issues that decommissioning could bring about. The meeting is in Manton, and there will be a Zoom option.

Adjourn