**Landowner Engagement Subcommittee Meeting**

**Monday, July 11th, 2022, 4 - 5:30 pm**

**Meeting Objectives:**

* Learn about local opportunities and techniques to apply prescribed fire to private lands.
* Participate in a peer-learning opportunity and learn from local landowners who are treating their green forest and responding to the Dixie Fire’s impacts.
* Hear from the Lassen National Forest about progress on the West Lassen Headwaters Project and how the Forest is moving forward after the Dixie Fire.

### **4:00 Introductions**

* Participants shared their name and any affiliations they wanted to include.
* Bella briefly went over the purpose of the Landowner Engagement Subcommittee:
  + Bringing together a collaborative group of landowners to strengthen the peer-to-peer landowner network.
  + Planning and implementing fuel reduction projects and accessing existing landowner assistance programs.
  + Facilitating cross-boundary work between private landowners and agencies.

**4:10**  **Plumas Underburn Cooperative (PUC) - Matt West**

* Matt described PUC as neighbors helping neighbors put prescribed fire back onto the landscape.
* Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) are popping up all over the country. PBAs are community-based, mutual aid networks that help private landowners put “good fire back on the land.” Association members pool their knowledge, capacity, and equipment to help other people in their association conduct prescribed burns.
* PUC intends to hire a fulltime coordinator soon.
* Matt briefly discussed the different between TREX and PUC. TREX is the professional version of PUC. TREX offers trainings for people to obtain their Basic 32 and Red Card. A Red Card allows PUC to do cross-boundary burning.
* Is underburning right for you? Matt described that underburns burn off pine needles and the duff layer, and the ground will look charred and black for a while. Landowners lose dead brush, stumps, and small trees. There are some ways to mitigate damage to some features you really want to keep (e.g., snags). Matt thinks it is important to make sure you want to do a burn because some people don’t like the appearance of fire effects.
* If you do decide you want to underburn on your property through PUC, you need to first fill out a PUC membership form online. There are different levels of membership, depending on how you’d like to be involved.
* Broadly, the underburrn process includes 1) an application by the landowner, 2) an initial visit (by a PUC rep), 3) site maintenance and preparation for the burn (PUC Rep, Landowner, Burn Boss), 4) the burn day itself, 5) mopping up and completing the burn.
* Matt briefly touched on the permits required to burn. Cal Fire permits are seasonal. There is open burning during the wet season. There is also “Dooryard pile burn permits,” which are obtainable online for free after watching a 4 min video. This allows you to burn piles. There are also “LE-7 Underburn permits.” These require writing an approved burn plan and CalFire needs to inspect the property. These permits are good for a couple weeks and are also free.
* Beyond Cal Fire permits, there are also Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District permits. These vary by region; some areas have permeant burn bans, due to population density. Permits depend on the size of the burn. For example, less than 1 acre does not require a permit. Burning 1 acre or greater needs an AQ permit. Over 10 acres requires a Smoke Management Plan. These are obtainable by calling the local Air Quality District, costs $75-150, and is good for 1 year.
* Matt also discussed liability associated with prescribed burning. There are two types of liability, suppression (cost it takes to put out a fire that gets out of control) and civil costs (costs associated with destroyed property). Matt described that who takes the liability depends on who the burnboss is.
* When an Agency is the burn boss, they assume the liability. CalFire can be a burnboss but it takes time due to the environmental compliance process. It is free.
* You can also hire a burnboss; this can be really expensive.
* Or, in the case of PUC, the landowner can take on burnboss role themselves, and therefore the liability.
* Recently, there have been changes in the CA state law to help protect landowners from liability. Under SB-332, you have to prove the homeowner did something really dumb. If you follow your Burn Plan, landowner won’t get sued for suppression costs (civil costs only).
* There is also a Prescribed Fire Claims Fund, which the state is setting up to contribute to civil costs.
* **No PBA’s in CA have had an escaped fire. PUC has never had an escaped fire.**

*Q&A*

* Does PUC only do burns in Plumas County?
  + Yes. But there are other PBA’s around California, that represent different counties.
* Does the property have to be prepared for this type of activity before the burn takes place? What do these prep activities look like?
  + The landowner needs to determine their objectives. Is it fuels reduction or ecological benefits? Your objective will dictate how you do your land prep. Prep may include: removing smaller trees, putting a fuel break around the unit you want to burn, removing big dead & down trees, or putting line around anything you don’t want to burn (e.g., your favorite snag that you love).

**4:35 Landowner Updates**

* Mary Davidge presented for Friends of Warner Valley on restoration and rebuilding after the Dixie Fire.
* Warner Valley is about 12 miles N of Chester. There used to be about 200 seasonal cabins, and about half burned in the Dixie Fire. After the fire, the community recognized a need for residents to come together to pool resources, preserve cultural history, learn about fire prevention, rebuild lost cabins, and work towards environmental goals.
* The area is a mix of federal lands and private property.
* The 1st challenge residents are running into is cabin rebuilding and site clean up. The Cal OES & FEMA clean up is complete. Many residents have enrolled in the EFoRT Program, which will help with site clearing and replanting.
* The next step is coming up with a long-term vision for restoring Warner Valley.
* Phred Starkweather presented next on forest management practices on the Battle Creek Meadows Ranch.
* The family started to focus on fuels reduction at BCMR in 2016, which coincided with commercial harvest, and was how they could afford the work.
* For now, BCMR is focused on planning for forest management while the timber market is stalled, they are also looking into forest health grants for the first time.
* Phred recognizes that the forest health problems around Turner Mountain are so pronounced and expansive. He views the next step as creating fuel breaks along the ranch and coordinating that with the Lassen National Forest, so they are placed strategically. He sees the West Lassen Headwaters Project as the perfect opportunity to do a cross-boundary burn.

*Q&A*

* Jim commented that managing Battle Creek Meadows Ranch is critical to the protection of Mineral. The Ranch is a neighbor to both the Lassen National Forest and the Lassen Volcanic National Park. This could be an opportunity for joint prescribed burn.
* Mary commented that the South Lassen Watersheds Group field tour in June reinforced the importance of meadow and watershed health. Mary was really impressed with all the work Battle Creek Meadows Ranch had done to restore their meadow system. She feels the Landowner Engagement Subcommittee could benefit from more discussion on meadow restoration.

**5:00 Lassen National Forest Update (Russell Nickerson)**

* Russell Nickerson provided a short update from the Lassen National Forest. The West Lassen Headwaters Project is in the process of engaging the community and the South Lassen Watersheds Group collaborative in developing the purpose for project.
* Russell wants to get public input as the Lassen National Forest starts the NEPA process with the “Proposed Action Purpose and Need” document.
* Forest Service staff have developed a team to tackle the environmental compliance (NEPA) planning process and is having meetings in the field to become familiar with the issues across the project landscape. The project is at a scale that the Forest has not worked at in previous years, but it is the scale necessary to make the forest and watersheds resilient to fire.
* From an Agency standpoint, it is very helpful when community members come together into groups to leverage all the abilities of the groups and streamline communication. This large-landscape effort will require us to work together across boundaries.
* Russell also provided a Dixie Fire update. Post-fire contracts focused on repairing fire lines used in the suppression efforts have been developed. The Forest is working on BAER (Burned Area Emergency Response) with contracting work. In terms of roadside hazard tree cleanup, the Lassen is working with the Regional Office to do NEPA across 6-8 forests that have been burned in California.

*Q&A*

* When will the Forest be wrapping up NEPA work for the West Lassen Headwaters Project?
* Russell responded that NEPA should wrap up in early 2024.

**5:30 Adjourn**

Next meeting in September