

**South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting**  
**Monday, January 23rd, 2023, 1:00-3:30 pm**

**Meeting Synopsis:**

In the January South Lassen Watersheds Group (SLWG) meeting, the collaborative heard an update about the status of the Upper Butte Creek Project PAPN. After that, the group heard a presentation from Ryan Burnett about Swain Meadow Restoration work. The group also heard an update from Todd Sloat from the Fall River RCD regarding their Feedstock Aggregation Project and a proposed WUI, Corridors, & Plantations NEPA. The meeting concluded with updates from the Lassen National Forest (LNF) about their herbicide use proposal, and the group continued the discussion about possible herbicide application.

**Attendees:**

Barbara Andrews: Silver Lake Homeowners  
Bella Bledsoe: Sierra Institute  
Bobby Howe: Collins Pine Co.  
Cameron Musser: Butte County RCD  
Faith Churchill: Butte County RCD  
Helen Leiser: Collins Pine Co  
Jake Blaufuss: SPI  
Jeanie Hinds: Plumas Corp  
Jim Houtman: Butte County Fire Safe Council  
Jim Richardson: LAVO  
Jonathan Kusel: Sierra Institute  
Ken Roby: Feather River Trout Unlimited  
Kristy Hoffman: SNC  
Kyle Rodgers: Sierra Institute  
Laura Corral: LNF  
Leida Schoggen: Friends of Warner Valley  
Leslie Mink: Plumas Corp  
Lorena Gorbet: MSC  
Mary Davidge: Friends of Warner Valley  
Matt Barton: Friends of Warner Valley

Michael Hall: Feather River RCD  
Mike Klimek: LAVO  
Nancy Nordensten: LAVO  
Nick Bunch: LNF  
Nils Lunder: Feather River Land Trust  
Peggy Fulder: LAWG  
Russell Nickerson: LNF  
Ryan Burnett: Point Blue  
Ryan Hilburn: Beaty  
Sophie Castleton: Sierra Institute  
Steve Buckley: National Park  
Terri Rust: Friends of Warner Valley  
Thomas Tisch: LAWG  
Todd Sloat: Fall River RCD  
Tom McCubbins: RCD of Tehama County  
Trey Hiller: Battle Creek Watershed Working  
Group  
Tuli Potts: SNC  
Wolfy Rougle: Butte County RCD

**Meeting Opening:**

Group members commented that riffle was misspelled in previous meeting notes, as was Triclopyr. The group entertained a motion to approve the December meeting minutes, and the minutes were approved with modifications. 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 Projects**

**Upper Butte Creek Project: Scoping Announcement**

- The ID Team is planning to review the PAPN until January 31st. From there, it will go to Russell for review and then to Tribes. Wolfy thinks it will go to the public for scoping in February.
- Wolfy also commented that the areas in the project that burned at high severity during the Dixie Fire look so different from the areas that burned in the Camp Fire. What are we going to do to keep the soil in place? The Camp Fire footprint is lower elevation and receives more precipitation as rain than snow. A lot of ground cover has come back. In the Dixie, there is little vegetation emerging by comparison.
- Jake added that once the PAPN gets put together, the group needs to make sure the scoping list is complete, and no one is missing.
- Wolfy commented that the team is working on that, but if there are contacts that should be on the list, please reach out. SLWG members will get the announcement.
- Ryan added that keeping soils in place is situation dependent. We need to take a varied approach based on slope position, history, and other factors.
- Wolfy commented that if people have insights about conditions and thresholds that should trigger actions, please let her know. If we see these conditions, what should we do?

#### **West Lassen Headwaters Project: Funding Announcement**

- Sierra Institute is anticipated to be recommended to the SNC board for funding for WLHP planning. We appreciate all the participation from group members; this will be paid dedicated capacity to the WLHP planning effort. The proposal includes funding for planning, data collection, data management, NEPA writing, and better incorporating tribal priorities. We are excited about advancing the work.
- Kristy added that the proposal is going to be considered by the board in March. She anticipates it will be approved.

#### **Implementation Project Updates**

##### **Swain Meadow Restoration**

- The Robbers Creek project, including Swain Meadow restoration, is a 4744-acre all-lands restoration effort. Objectives of this initial collaborative project include healthy, diverse, fire-resilient forests, and restored riparian areas, wet meadows, and aspen stands. The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) is supporting implementation.
- Robbers Creek is a tributary to Mountain Meadows reservoir. Swain Meadow has some stream channel incision; an old road went right across the meadow, creating a flow constriction issue. There used to be a dairy in some of the meadow, and it has had a lot of use for the last 150 years.
- Currently, the water level is about 2-3 feet below the bank; the goal is to bring water to the surface and get it to spill into the meadow.
- The meadow also had heavy conifer encroachment; some areas have converted to lodge pole forest.
- Part of the project will include building beaver dam analogs (BDAs), mimicking beavers by weaving willows together and packing them with soil, creating our best imitation of a beaver dam. This may encourage beavers to come back. We will also reconstruct riffles.
- The meadow also includes one of the largest known populations of Lassen Paintbrush. We will do some revegetation of *Castilleja lessensis* (Lassen Paintbrush).
- This last year, the STRAW program, including students from Chester and Westwood, in partnership with Symbiotic Restoration, Todd Sloat, and Sierra Institute, built 20 BDAs and brought out 170 students, teachers, and community volunteers into the field. This was a big collaboration.

- Seed collection was completed, and a revegetation plan for Lassen Paintbrush was developed.
- We have also done some aspen fencing to protect stands before deer come in and munch them all down. PCREW and Sophie from SI, went out and fenced a bunch of stands (about 10 stands). The goal is to protect them for three years until the aspen shoots get over 5.5 feet tall.
- Next steps will include implementing ruffle treatments, maintaining BDAs, planting the container stock, ecological monitoring, and conifer removal upstream.
- Barbara asked if volunteers and others use the iNaturalist app at all.
- Ryan said they had not, but they could. Ryan thinks it would be a great way for the kids to track their project.
- Ken asked about the grazing plan for the meadow after restoration. The meadow is a pass-through allotment.
- Ryan mentioned that he has talked to the cattle owner, and the cattle owner was scoped on the whole project and has been out to see the project. Ryan hopes to coordinate with him and have him not pass cows through the area next summer, right after restoration work. We do not want them to trample ruffles. Grazing management is important to project success, and we should follow up again.

## **Fall River RCD**

### **Feedstock Aggregation Project**

- Todd explained that this project is being funded by the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) to try and address the urgent need to significantly increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and the limited outlets for biomass residuals, which are often pile burned or lopped and scattered.
- The RCD submitted a grant to OPR and developed a project team of RCD staff, consultants, licensed timber operators, and others. The RCD was awarded the grant; five of these projects were funded across the State.
- The team started by drawing a boundary, centering around the junction of three counties. The radius for hauling material is about 100 miles.
- The project intends to think through how to develop a semi-public wood broker to manage wood supply contracts between forest health projects and wood utilization businesses. This would help guarantee a long-term supply of fuel by bundling many short-term contracts for multiple wood utilization end-users.
- A semi-public structure would: 1) Absorb risk for forest landowners and biomass facilities, 2) Enhance multiple existing local businesses while expanding regional capacity to process additional material via emerging facilities, 3) Offer tools and products, 4) Manage biomass contracts, and 5) Organize projects and facilities to make more attractive to investors and granting agencies.
- The outcomes of this project are 1) A regional biomass supply assessment, including economic and market validation, 2) Selecting an Organizational Structure (e.g., A Joint Powers Authority--JPA, a new division of an existing state agency), and 3) Building an Action Plan. The project will conclude at the end of 2024.
- Questions from the group?
- Wolfy: If the price a buyer offers does not cover the costs of implementation or moving biomass, would the JPA help get more money for this? Todd answered yes, the JPA could do that.
- Jonathan: Could a JPA act as a cooperative entity? Todd answered yes. He sees cooperation built into establishing a JPA, directly connecting suppliers to community outcomes.

- Todd added that a JPA is a novel concept. However, we talk about the need to guarantee feedstock all the time. If we build a wood utilization facility, the facility needs to know that it can get feedstock. Agencies are uncomfortable providing this guarantee and have contracting limitations. We hope a structure like this facilitates some assurance of feedstock.
- Todd added that anyone wanting to participate in the project review group is welcome.

#### **Cross-Collaborative Information Sharing: WUI, Corridors, & Plantations NEPA**

- Todd also reported that Burney Hat Creek is considering future project work. WUIs have always jumped out as a priority. Corridors and plantations have also risen to the top of the list as investments to protect. The group provided a letter to Deb, looking to create a district-level project focused on WUI, plantations, and linear corridors. The RCD is also open to taking this Forest-wide.
- Todd is interested in how partners might feel about the RCD taking this project Forest-wide. He is open to discussion, thoughts, and feedback from the South Lassen Watersheds Group. If the SLWG wanted to help, the RCD would be open to including the Almanor Ranger District area. What is the appropriate scale for this project?
- Jake commented that we cannot have overlapping NEPA, so boundaries cannot overlap existing projects.
- Todd responded that the project would be separate from existing projects. He is not interested in duplicating efforts.
- Kyle commented that the SLWG has discussed priority areas and watersheds, but not necessarily features. It seems like BHC is looking more at types of features. How is BHC balancing prioritizing areas versus features?
- Todd said the emphasis on WUIs was heightened by the Dixie Fire. Why are we doing Backbone when there is still fuel around Burney. BHC is interested in tackling some of the areas where there is agreement about urgency. Corridors are similar; it is infrastructure we know we need.
- Steve: How do PODs fit into this?
- Todd said he did not know anything about PODs until a couple of months ago. To him, they seem helpful for fire management thinking and useful as anchors for managing fire.
- Russell added that the Forest is still working on PODs; there are many ways to use them in the future. They will support future fire management, but they will also help future prescribed fire, as well as accounting for community and collaborative values across the landscape. PODs can help with the prioritization of the landscape. On the Upper Butte Creek Project, the Forest is trying to align some boundaries with PODS.
- Nils added that he is optimistic about PODs; there are a lot of opportunities to use PODs in different ways. He is excited to discuss how to use PODs together.

#### **Lassen National Forest Herbicide Meeting**

##### **Updates from the Forest herbicide meeting on December 14th**

- Laura commented that for the Upper Butte Creek Project, we are hoping to use herbicides for invasive plant species. They also want to use herbicide for reforestation--for site prep and for reducing competing vegetation. The Forest is also considering what amount of forest vegetation should be left as snag patches. They are looking to the Post-Fire Restoration Framework for National Forests in California to select places for reforestation and are homing in on big patches that have little chance of natural regeneration.

- We will not use herbicide around streams, rivers, riparian areas, or near threatened or endangered plants.
- The Forest is planning to develop a story map that a person could go and look at when and where herbicide will be applied.
- Laura also added that there is flexibility between FS projects on herbicide usage (e.g., UBC and WLHP). Decisions have not been made; we have not even scoped the WLHP yet. There is room for group input on how we want to move forward.
- Jake added that herbicide is a tool in the toolbox, and it speeds up succession. Herbicide is a tool to get forests back into place; that is why the timber industry uses herbicides. It can help get a burned area closer to and further along toward becoming a forest.
- Matt asked, what is the process by which downstream water users can provide input or feedback on widespread herbicide application? Is that done through NEPA?
- Russell commented that it is done through NEPA. We look at the potential impacts downstream when we scope a project. For example, we scope the project to water quality boards. Russell added that there is flexibility on how much acreage receives an herbicide treatment. It will not be the full project area.
- Kyle commented that we are trying to do condition-based management for both projects (UBC, WLHP). From that sense, under what conditions does it make sense to use herbicide, and when does it not? About 20 percent or 30 percent of public lands burned in the Dixie Fire within the WLHP area. There is wilderness, steep slopes, and other factors that reduce the feasibility of reforestation. The reality is we are talking about a smaller acreage. We are not talking about a broadcast treatment of the whole area.
- Jake agreed. We are not going to be able to reforest every acre. The Dixie Fire was huge. Industry will not be able to take that amount of saw logs. We must be proactive if we want forest.
- Mary asked, what are the tradeoffs to our body or the water if we use herbicide. It is tough to understand.
- Russell said there is a lot of research and published information. The literature covers many different things about the varying chemicals, including which ones break down, how long it takes to break down, the impacts on water, and more.
- Wolfy commented that it is amazing to hear about the resources available to specialists trying to decide whether, where, and how much herbicide to use. There is a spreadsheet that Forest Service specialists can fill out, weighing all the potential resource concerns, trade-offs, suggested buffers, and mitigations, depending on the resource they are looking at. There are huge narrative reports available for people to review. Farmers never get this. Landscapers never get this. Landlords or city managers never get this. Herbicide is sprayed without our consent all the time, and we never get to weigh all these concerns. It is exhilarating to have the information available.
- Steve added that the Park has been managing weeds for a while, using a range of herbicides. Application rates are very low and are done under strict environmental conditions--not over certain wind speeds, not if it's going to rain, and outside certain buffer zones. A lot of controls are built into the process.
- The Moonlight Fire was a small fire, only about 65,000 acres. 60% of that area burned at high severity, and now about 29% is a shrub field. We really are losing forest.
- Ryan commented that we need to be careful about where we use herbicide. Large-scale salvage operations are a concern. Phosphorus-based herbicides are a concern. I am not really a big fan of broad-scale interruption. There might be places where it is useful-- it is super useful for invasives like Canada

Thistle. There is a place for these chemicals, but we have to be careful about how we use them. We need to understand how they impact the soil microbiome fully. We have to do more research and study this. When we tinker with nature, we have unintended consequences.

- Wolfy commented that after the Camp Fire, we did some reforestation with herbicides. It was relatively successful. Before this role, I was a farmer. The volume and frequency applied for reforesting are so small compared to what is used daily in agriculture. And the benefits are much greater.
- Jonathan commented that he appreciates the Forest's willingness to be responsive to the concerns of the group.

## **Partner Updates**

### **Plumas Corporation**

- Mountain Meadows Creek: 65% percent done with project design. Seeking funds for implementation.
- Mackenzie Meadow: hoping to implement it in 2024. Also seeking funding for that.
- We have a conceptual design for Moonlight Crossing on lower Goodridge.
- Rock Creek: seeking additional funding to maintain those structures.
- Yellow creek-Symbiotic Restoration: They got in a lot of BDAs that we plan to maintain.

### **Sierra Nevada Conservancy**

- Kristy updated the group that the SNC board meeting is on March 1st and 2nd. She would love to get partners there. Several SLWG partner projects will be presented to the board.
- All partners and the public are also invited to the WIP summit, which is the day before the board meeting.
- The next board meeting is in Plumas county on May 31st and June 1st.

### **Sierra Institute**

- Sierra Institute received funding from the Department of Conservation to plan a hydrogen production facility that will need ~130,000 tons of biomass per year. This will be a place to take biomass that will produce liquid hydrogen. It is a proven technology, and we are starting the planning process.

### **Point Blue**

- Ryan commented that the Wildlife Conservation Board approved a grant to Point Blue for almost 25 million last week. This will support the pace and scale of meadow restoration in a big way across all the Sierra Nevada. The block grant idea took hold. Ryan will circulate a project proposal solicitation notice.

## **Adjourn**