



South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting Tuesday, April 4th, 2023, 1:00-3:30 pm

Meeting Synopsis:

In the April South Lassen Watersheds Group (SLWG) meeting, the collaborative heard a presentation from the Lassen National Forest about Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) and discussed how the collaborative group might use PODs. The group also continued the discussion on herbicide application and discussed the possible application for the purpose of reforestation within the West Lassen Headwaters Project (WLHP) area. The meeting concluded with a presentation from Blue Forest on a developing Forest Resilience Bond.

Attendees:

Anna Glenn: Sierra Institute	Laura Corral: LNF
Annapurna Holtzapple: Blue Forest	Leslie Mink: Plumas Corp
Barbara Andrews: Silver Lake Homeowners	Matt Barton: Friends of Warner Valley
Bella Bledsoe: Sierra Institute	Matt Sjöholm: Blue Forest
Bobby Howe: Collins Pine Co.	Nancy Nordensten: LAVO
Doug Peters: LNF	Patricia Puterbaugh: Lassen Forest Preservation Grp
Faith Churchill: Butte County RCD	Phred Starkweather: Battle Creek Meadows Ranch
Gabe Schultz: Cal Fire	Rebecca Holdowsky: Butte County Fire Safe Council
Gwen Evans: Sierra Institute	Ron Lunder: LAWG
Heidi Van Gieson: LNF	Russell Nickerson: LNF
Helen Leiser: Collins Pine Co	Ryan Burnett: Point Blue
Ian Foraker -Silver Lake Homeowner	Stephaney Cox: LNF
Jeanie Hinds: Plumas Corp	Thomas Tisch: LAWG
Jim Houtman: Butte County Fire Safe Council	Tom Getts: UC Cooperative Extension
Jim Richardson: LAVO	Tom McCubbins: RCD of Tehama County
Johnie Bruce: Feather River College	Trey Hiller: Battle Creek Watershed Working Group
Jonathan Kusel: Sierra Institute	Tuli Potts: SNC
Juan Martinez: LAVO	Tyler Woollard: LNF
Kathryn Raeder: RCD of Tehama County	Wolfy Rougle: Butte County RCD
Kelly Mosinski: LNF	
Ken Roby: Feather River Trout Unlimited	
Kristy Hoffman: SNC	
Kyle Rodgers: Sierra Institute	

Meeting Opening:

The group entertained a motion to approve the January 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.

Upper Butte Creek Scoping Update

- The UBC project is out for scoping. The legal notices went out to Plumas Paper and Chico Enterprise. Scoping emails are going out as well. There is a scheduled public meeting at the Chico Library on April 20th. Russell and Wolfy will be at the library meeting for those that want to make comments or ask questions in person.

Potential Operational Delineations (PODs)

- Russell provided a PODs overview to the group. Russell commented that the fire seasons are getting longer, and more money is being spent on firefighting. We need to expand more of the right kind of fire, suppress fire where needed, and adapt our homes and communities.
- PODs address near and long-term wildfire risk. The goal of PODs is to align land management actions with wildfire response and improve shared governance in wildfire management. PODs also allow for the pre-identification of areas that are a high risk to fire responder safety, the characterization of suppression difficulty, and the identification of landscape features like slope, aspect, fuel type, and recent fires. PODs are the spatial depiction of fire management opportunities and challenges.
- The edges of PODs include potential control locations (roads, ridges). Within each POD, the suppression difficulty index is identified. Developing PODs includes mapping out the landscape and identifying heavy fuel areas, topography, local knowledge, and values at risk, including-habitat values, infrastructure values, power lines, houses, and drinking water supplies.
- Mapping allows fire managers to look at areas we do not want a fire to get to, as well as potential areas to put in some control lines to help give us the best chance of stopping the fire before it gets to the values in the community. We use a quantitative wildfire risk assessment and burn probability to model which values we could lose if there were a fire in the area. Over 60 national forests are working on POD development and mapping. Forests are looking to readjust POD lines and pull spatial information together.
- Laura asked, have we identified these GIS layers and indices for the West Lassen Headwaters project area?
- Russell responded that some are created, but he is not sure whether POD-related modeling is done. Oregon State University may be able to help with that and help get that spatial data quicker.
- Laura responded that she needs to have post-Dixie fire metrics to accurately look at burned areas.
- Ryan asked if we could use PODs to move towards more wildland fire use.

- Russell responded: I see PODs being used past suppression. We might be able to look at where we want to put in permanent lines and possibly use the same holding features for prescribed fire.

Reforestation in the West Lassen Headwaters Project Area

- Sierra Institute looked at some reforestation possibilities for the West Lassen Headwaters project using a GIS exercise; we created some possible reforestation scenarios to show the group. The first layer we started with was Michelle Coppoletta's opportunities for conifer reforestation assessment. Michelle's research suggested broad-scale actions and was just an initial assessment. It was not site-specific. We focused on the areas of Michelle's assessment with a low to moderate probability of natural regeneration. If an area has a high probability of natural regeneration, it is not a high priority for us to reforest. We also specified that the reforestation areas have to be on LNF land, outside of inventory roadless areas or proposed wilderness, and the slope has to be under 35% so that the areas are accessible.
- Sierra Institute also created scenarios that eliminated reforestation in high-quality woodpecker habitats, as well as outside of PODs where fire is going to be frequent.
- Areas identified with low to moderate probability of natural conifer regeneration on LNF land totaled about 6,000 acres. Further dialing down to areas outside of wilderness and inventoried roadless areas totaled 3360 acres. Adding in a slope of less than 35% put us down to 2828 acres.
- Including high-quality blackback woodpecker habitat decreased possible reforestation areas by another 600 acres. Eliminating PODs that are more likely to see fire decreased acreage by another 400 acres. We are curious if there are other criteria that ought to be considered.
- Barbara asked if Sierra Institute looked at wildlife corridors and food sources for wildlife. Gwen said we did not look at that. Barbara added that Marten habitat has drastically decreased. She wonders how important it will be to attract them back into certain areas. What existed before that allowed them to thrive there?
- Trish added that she thinks accessibility is an important criteria because replanted areas need maintenance. Marten needs an old growth habitat that is pretty complex. Reforested areas would take a while to invite Marten back to these plantations.
- Ken added that he has some comments on the criteria. It seems like some of the blocks are huge. Are they a practical size? He also added that planning reforestation with some eye towards how they fit with suppression is worthwhile too. He did not understand the POD criteria.
- Kyle responded that planted trees are going to be a value on the landscape. The POD that is in Upper Mill Creek, for example, includes a huge inventoried roadless, proposed wilderness area. We do not want to make investments in replanting where it might be acceptable to have fire. This might be an area where managed fire is possible. In contrast, we work really hard to keep wildfire out of the WUI.

- Trish added that we probably should not put reforested areas near maintained control lines.
- Laura commented that she feels like plantations are being talked about like it is a bad word. She feels like we should keep replanted areas in PODs. We could burn through them; we can prescribe burn them.
- Kyle added that we also want to consider criteria as a means of prioritization. We are not throwing areas out, but we are prioritizing areas for treatment first. We should acknowledge again that this is just a GIS exercise. Maybe in real life, we do plant there.
- Tom asked, do PODs incorporate private lands? Russell said that PODs do incorporate state and private lands. The FS has had some meetings with Cal Fire and Fire Safe Councils. As we move into the next phases of accounting for values, how can we integrate efforts across land ownership boundaries? The FS is in ongoing communication with SPI and Collins. How do we plant differently and integrate efforts?
- Bobby from Collins commented that he participated in a collaborative meeting on the Plumas NF. He agreed it is important to talk through putting POD lines through private ground. We can try and line them up with existing fuel breaks and existing fuel treatments. We should be looking at these cross-boundary treatments and incorporating areas where Collins and SPI have already undertaken fuel treatment. Bobby also added that site prep for reforestation may actually be good for fire. Sometimes plantations can be well maintained, as opposed to FS lands.
- Ryan added that the FS land adjacent to the Park should possibly be managed differently. We know that the park uses wildland fire, and it is important to consider how the FS might manage their lands in relation to that. We got pretty lucky that only 6,000 acres will not reforest themselves. There are areas with a greater need for reforestation. There are huge blocks. How do we prioritize? Can we look at the larger Dixie Fire? Where do we have the best chance of recovering the forest?
- Jonathan asked if the narrow criteria alleviated any concerns.
- Ryan responded that if herbicide is more limited in use, concerns start to decrease. Herbicide should be applied in a targeted, narrow area. I tend to think that we have a poor track record of regrowing forests. If we are going to try and regrow it, we need to prioritize.
- Tom added I think we just need to be smart about it, and this represents that.
- Jim commented that we do not want to use specific herbicides that we know are going to harm our fish. We can do these smart applications and pick the right herbicides to help our forest grow and not harm our fish. It is hard to gauge benefits and costs because we do not know the outcome of the project yet.
- Trey added that there are 78 miles of PGE ditches. These areas were treated for over 120 years with herbicides. They directly feed a fish hatchery. Trey has not heard many complaints or issues from CDFW, the State water board, or DWR.
- Matt answered yes, when you dial back and create limitations, it limits the impact of herbicide. We have heard from many folks, and we need to hear other perspectives.

There has not been sufficient info on human health impacts. We should take more time to mitigate the health impacts of herbicides. We should get someone who can weigh in with some public health knowledge.

Blue Forest Presentation

- Matt and Annapurna from Blue Forest provided an overview of the Forest Resilience Bond.
- Blue Forest is a non-profit that does conservation finance. The organization has just over 20 people, including foresters, scientists, and engineers. The goal of this work is to support landscape-scale projects and bring more resources to projects that have benefits to downstream users.
- Annapurna described that the way it works is that investors provide upfront capital. The forest resilience bond is a place to hold that capital, which is eventually transferred to the implementation partner. The implementation partner could be a local government, an RCD, a Tribe, a conservation group, or some other entity. The implementation group often has a lot of trust with the land manager. Then, the implementation partner can hire a ground crew and partners to get activities done. Over time, activities take place, and beneficiaries pay back to the forest resilience bond. Beneficiary groups can be various (e.g., utilities, corporations). In these cases, the land manager and implementation partner help with project planning and use upfront capital to contract. Blue Forest does contracts and agreements with different groups.
- Wolfy asked, what is Sierra Institute's relationship to Blue Forest? Jonathan answered that SI has had a few conversations about the project work happening in the Forest. Blue Forest is also on the SI board. We have made no agreements and just wanted to bring this idea forward as a conversation piece.
- Trish asked how the money gets paid back. Annapurna answered that there is a loan agreement with investors, and interest is paid back to investors. Then the money is paid back from beneficiaries, such as water agencies or corporations.
- Matt B. asked what the general interest rate is. Matt S. answered that it depends on the market and current security rates. We want to keep them as low as possible.
- Wolfy asked why someone would want to invest in this with a low-interest rate.
- Matt S. answered that it is often impact-oriented investors. They like having a portfolio of investments that reduce fire risks. They might be looking for a concessional return through positive impact on wildfire risk reduction or watershed resilience.

Partner Updates

Sierra Nevada Conservancy

- The WLHP planning project received an award from SNC. SNC also funded a Dixie Recovery Project on Collins land. The next board meeting is in Chester on May 31st and June 1st.



- The next round of funding is open starting in April, and concept proposals are due in mid-June. Final applications are due in late September.

Adjourn

Field Meeting on Tuesday, June 13th