



South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting Tuesday, January 23rd, 2024, 1:00-3:30 pm

Meeting Synopsis:

In the January South Lassen Watersheds Group (SLWG) meeting, the collaborative heard updates, asked questions, and discussed three projects on the Lassen National Forest--Upper Butte Creek, West Lassen Headwaters, and the Dixie Fire Community Protection Project. The group also discussed implementation on the Lassen National Forest, including priority areas and processes for collaborative implementation; this included an update on the submitted National Fish and Wildlife Foundation pre-proposal and how it might support implementation activities. The meeting concluded with updates from the Lassen Volcanic National Park on winter and spring work, and the Maidu Summit Consortium on the progress of a recent beaver release in Humbug Valley.

Attendees:

Barbara Andrews: Silver Lake HOA	Lorena Gorbet: Maidu Summit Consortium
Bella Bledsoe: Sierra Institute	Mary Davidge: Friends of Warner Valley
Dan Ostmann: LAVO	Melissa Smith
Gia Martynn: Plumas Corp	Pati Nolen: Tehama County Sup.
Faith Churchill: Butte County RCD	Patricia Puterbaugh: Lassen Forest Preservation Grp
Gwen Evans: Sierra Institute	Peggy Fulder: LAWG
Heidi Van Gieson: LNF	Russell Nickerson: LNF
Helen Leiser: Collins	Ryan Burnett: Point Blue
Janie Ackley: LNF	Sheli Wingo: USFWS
Jeanie Hinds: Plumas Corp	Sophie Castleton: Sierra Institute
Jeremy Curtis: LAVO	Stephaney Cox: LNF
Jim Richardson: Mineral Firewise	Thomas Tisch: LAWG
Jonathan Kusel: Sierra Institute	Trey Hiller: Battle Creek Watershed Working Group
Julia Sidman: FRRCD	Tricia Bratcher: CDFW
Kathryn Raeder: RCD of Tehama County	Trinity Stirling: SNC
Ken Roby: Feather River Trout Unlimited	Tuli Potts: SNC
Kurt Merino: Susanville Indian Rancheria	Vincent Vitale: Sierra Institute
Kristy Hoffman: SNC	Wolfy Rougle: Butte County RCD
Kyle Rodgers: Sierra Institute	
Laura Corral: LNF	
Leida Schoggen: Friends of Warner Valley	

Meeting Opening

The group did introductions and then entertained a motion to approve the agenda and past meeting minutes. Trish said she reviewed the meeting notes and asked if someone could explain more about the proposed emergency action in the WLHP around Mineral. She is confused about what that means and where it might happen. Jonathan explained that emergency work is just being proposed around Mineral for community protection purposes.

Trish said she also has questions about the Upper Butte Creek project. The group will touch on that later in the agenda. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved, and so was the agenda.

West Lassen Headwaters Project - Scoping

- This group has been working for a while now on this project, since before the Dixie Fire. The timeline has been shifted, but we are back at it. The WUI is being prioritized first for treatments. Some of the project area burned in the Dixie Fire, and some is the last remaining green forest on the Almanor Ranger District of LNF. We are heading into public scoping. We anticipate releasing the PAPN to the public in early February and are nailing down the date. We hope to begin Tribal scoping this week.
- There should not be a lot of new content in the PAPN, but please do review and comment. We are going to have maps available to the public and are planning to upload maps into Avenza, so you can open them on your phone and take them out into the field with you. There will also be a map packet on the project website; those maps will be georeferenced. We plan on having a virtual public meeting on February 22nd on Zoom at 5 pm. This will be an opportunity to ask questions about the project and talk more with folks.
- Trish - The details are critical. We often do not really know the details of the project until the scoping letter comes out. Sophie: When we release the EA, we will also release an implementation plan. That is one way we are trying to get from a large landscape condition-based NEPA to specific implementation areas, with opportunities for public feedback and assessment. Jonathan: As everyone knows, we are not identifying every action on every acre, at every moment. We are trying to express an approach to be used as we begin implementation; this is a way of moving forward that also incorporates the diverse perspectives of this group. We will have field tours, further conversations, and trust-building.
- Trish—CBM is a new concept. I look forward to whatever it turns out to be and how that plays out on the landscape. Bella—There will be maps as well. It will not be perfectly granular, but the treatments should not have too much mystery. Jonathan—The SI team is working hard to ensure this is consistent with this group's objectives.

Collaborative Implementation

- WLHP—Here is an unfinished map of priority areas around Mineral. We are considering emergency action on approximately 3k acres around Mineral. This is a dense forest, and it is very important to treat it first. Mill Creek is also a priority.
- Kyle - For context, this is early in the WLHP to talk about implementation. One of the key takeaways from conversations with the FS elsewhere and partners is that the process for integrating feedback into implementation is critical to the success of projects long term. Having a clear path for how communication will happen once implementation begins is essential. It is even more critical as we go bigger to discuss

this early. We will be starting to shift efforts to engage the collaborative group in how we develop and refine the implementation plan.

- Trish: Private land management is part of the NEPA process in some ways because the assessment is on the entire landscape - what do conditions look like on lands next to our project? This analyzes cumulative effects. Mineral has needed fuel reduction for decades. The watershed there is sensitive, and there are carnivores, CSO, and probably Red fox in the area.
- Wolfy - For the UBC project, we are looking around to figure out the highest priority areas for implementation. We've known since the beginning that these are areas right around communities that have green forest. However, when a green timber sale is required, like it would be to treat these areas, that's the kind of treatment that takes the most time and FS investment. There is a real need to phase work from the day after the decision is signed to a long way away. After all, FS also has projects that came before that also need to get done: West Shore and Robbers. We cannot just start on everything in UBC immediately, necessarily.
- But some work can happen quicker—hand thinning, road work, stream improvement work. For the NFWF proposal, we have decided to focus on road decommissioning and meadow work in UBC as well as the first, most strategic, 500 acres of post-Dixie reforestation. We can start working on these very quickly and will have big hydrological benefits right away. With subsequent grant opportunities, we will look at funding service work around communities, like hand thinning.
- Trish - I am worried there will be objections or legal problems to UBC, and there is some really critical work in here, like this meadow work. I am not sure how 10% canopy cover will work along fire management features. Wolfy responded- I do have concerns about how that treatment will be maintained. I expect comments will come back on the draft EA. it does seem like something we could modify after the EA. We have conversations about that on the IDT. A lot of the ingress-egress prescriptions will work out to be 40% because it intersects with wildlife areas. But not all of it I have not seen a treatment like that maintained long-term successfully. Trish - I am not sure there is any science that 10% would stop a fire from running across that road. Wolfy – You're right, and the expectation isn't that the feature would actually stop a fire, but that it would be a safe staging area for crews during a wildfire and during a prescribed fire. But for that to happen it needs to be maintainable.
- Sophie provided a short Implementation Plan preview. Russell is on board with an implementation guide as an appendix to the EA. As part of the plan, we will need to do a geospatial exercise to break out the project area into implementable chunks. This is a good time for collaborative input. Then, there will be a checkpoint for different resource specialists to outline what needs to happen before implementation can happen. We will be delaying surveys to pre-implementation, so there will be a checkpoint for all the different resource specialists to make sure that we are doing the appropriate surveys in

the right places. Then, there will be checkpoints for public outreach. Jonathan - this is a general process for input and collaboration.

- Mary - I am wondering, with all the workshops, small groups, and larger groups, is there a point in time where we get feedback on whether that process worked, or not? There was so much that went into it; at what point do you know whether the process works? Kyle - when the PAPN comes out, does the document look like what we discussed? I am going to flip that around. That will be the time to see if it worked for the group. Does the group feel like we had an influence on the document? Bella - we will also look at the comments. What do they say? Sophie - we had broad convos about values; we hope it comes out in the document, but the document is much more detailed than some of the conversations we had as a group. Can we capture all the diversity of perspectives and integrate those values and perspectives into the details of the document? Jonathan - as this moves forward, we expect continued involvement to ensure we get it right.

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Proposal Update

- We are putting in a pre-proposal to NFWF with SI and partners. The goal is to allocate larger blocks of funding to collaborative efforts trying to get to landscape scale. The NFWF solicitation is focused on collaboratives, Dixie Fire-impacted watersheds, and watershed health. SI pulled together partners: BCRC, American Rivers, and the Burney Hat Creek collaborative, and stitched together a pre-proposal across LNF districts.
- Hopefully we will know soon if we are invited for a full proposal.

Lassen National Forest - Project Updates

Dixie Fire Community Protection Project

- The team has decided to expand the project area to all the burned areas. Laura volunteered to hop back on the team to represent silviculture. We will be sending out the new boundary PAPN for scoping. The expanded boundary includes all of the Dixie footprint, outside UBC, WLHP, the caribou wilderness, and anadromous areas. Question: do you know when the plan will be out for comment? Laura will follow up.
- Barb, are you taking on the project lead? Laura- I am just stepping in for Silv. I do not have time for the ID team lead. There is no project lead determined yet. Kristy- is there a current map? Laura- no new map yet. Kristy, could that be sent out also??? Laura will work on getting that.
- Jonathan: For the SLWG areas, is outreach to this group possible? Laura- I will have to ask.
- Mary - It would be helpful to have some informal presentations before we have to comment during scoping. We want an opportunity for feedback informally. Barb - met with Deb B and Frank Heide not too long ago; it would be great to have a longer comment period. This would give more opportunity to review the expanded project.

Upper Butte Creek Project

- We were supposed to have EA out to Tribes today. However, R5 is undertaking a review of all projects on the Lassen that are proposing forest plan amendments for spotted owls. This includes UBC, WLHP, and Backbone (on the Hat Creek RD). The ecosystem planning team will review the plan amendments. Deb nominated Backbone to be first. We are not sure what to expect. It is possible that we could be asked to change our plan amendments. I do not know. I do know that projects up and down the Sierra are proposing a diversity of project-level plan amendments that align with the best available science, but emphasize different aspects of it or emphasize place-specific treatment priorities.
- We could see a memo at the regional level, or it could be the Washington Office. It sounds like they will direct teams to compare project-level plan amendments and seek consistency going forward. Laura - there is a potential for CSO to be listed as a federally endangered or threatened species. That is one of the reasons they are making this push.
- Laura—They are going to review Backbone first. It will take about three weeks for Backbone and then another three weeks for UBC. We will work with RO planning staff at several key junctions.
- Ryan - What are the plan amendments for owls? What are you doing differently? Wolfy - our proposals came from the 2019 CSO strategy and can be found at the back of the PAPN. There are changes to the procedure for retiring PACs and new guidance for phasing PACs (i.e., deciding which would be entered first). A lot is just changing the strategy and direction language on how to make decisions. There is a shifting focus towards a greater emphasis on long-term resilience, even if it comes with some short-term impact.
- Ryan - we have better science now. Hopefully, projects will be able to create these mosaics.

Lassen Volcanic National Park

- We have burned piles near Discovery Center, the Northwest Gateway Phase 2 project, and piles near Butte Lake. More relevant to this group, we did a lot of post-Dixie hazard tree work, which resulted in piles of treetops and limbs. In the Juniper Lake area, we have 80 piles we are looking to burn resulting from hazard tree work. Similarly, in the WV area, we have large piles of limbs and tops that were removed. When we have enough snow or reliable rain, we will begin burning those bigger piles. We have not had the snowpack we usually get at the mid-elevations. We are hesitant to light larger piles until we get better snow or at least several weeks of rain.
- Near Mineral, we have some recently acquired parcels. We are in the process of hand thinning and piling these units. Unit J has been piled and pile burned. We finished N and O last week. We will focus on units L and K this year. We want to burn the piles to support future broadcast burning on these units.

- In talking with folks on the Forest, we want to broadcast burn an area around the Park headquarters. We are hoping to burn across boundary, focusing a bit more on the North side around the Park headquarters. The goal is to not burn from midslopes if possible. The next steps are to cross reference with wildlife, and make sure we are not impacting habitats negatively. Though, it would occur in the fall, outside of the limited operating period. This area is of strategic importance because of the threat of fire coming from west to east. Ideally, it would help slow a fire around town and give a chance for suppression operations.
- We are also starting to examine the Park's fire management plan and look forward to sharing it with this group at a future meeting.

Humbug Valley - Beaver Release

- Lorena -We have been trying for the last 25 years or so to get beavers back into Humbug. We did creek restoration in Humbug Valley to create a habitat for beavers.
- Plumas Corp implemented a creek and meadow restoration project in 2014, including pond-and-plug installation, bank cutting, and other measures.
- When the land was returned to the Maidu, we resumed trying to bring the beaver back.
- According to the Maidu oral history, beavers have always been present on the landscape. CDFW had a conflicting history of the land and said that beavers were introduced in the 1940s.
- Occidental Environmental performed carbon dating on beaver-cut wood from a dam. The wood dates back to 750-1300 AD, which confirmed historical beaver occupancy in the area.
- CDFW relocated beavers. Maidu Summit and Tasmam Koyom were chosen as a pilot project for beaver relocation. The main concern was disease.
- Seven beavers were relocated from Sutter County in October, one beaver moved in on its own this summer for a total of 8. They are GPS-tagged.
- Most have stayed in the pond-and-plug area, but one has traveled a bit further. All have been seen on trail cams. They look like they are lodging and building dams.
- Question from Stephaney: What is the plan for long-term genetic diversity? Lorena - Two families were translocated, plus one individual migrated. More will come in as the beaver makes the habitat marshier and more suitable for other beavers.
- This is a pilot project; we are waiting to see if the beavers stay in the area and survive before doing more around the state. The main concern is disease.
- Trail cams help keep track of not just beavers but other wildlife too.
- Contact: Robert Pegel, CDFW Biologist at Riverside Parkway in Sacramento
- We will keep folks updated on how it goes. More success means more incentive to do similar projects elsewhere.

Partner Updates

Sierra Nevada Conservancy

- We have a couple of small updates. Our strategic plan is available for public comment, and we would love to get feedback. It should be available on the website in the next couple of days.
- State budget situation: we are not going to be able to have a funding round for this spring. We are not slated in the budget for this year. We have had several years of a good run; we hope it is a temporary situation. We have hired new staff to help with projects that are in place. Trinity just started. Trinity - I am excited to be in this new role, and support Kristy, Tuli, and the rest of the SNC staff.

Sierra Institute

- CERF rebranded as Jobs First. We are holding several subcommittee meetings. If you are interested, please let us know. We are welcoming more folks to subcommittees. With the state funding crisis, commitments are still rolling forward. We are linking state, private, and federal efforts across multiple sectors.

RCD of Tehama County

- Coming up on February 1st, we have a webinar with Cal Poly Swan Pacific Ranch. If you are interested in attending, here is the link:
<https://spranch.calpoly.edu/collaborative-fuels-reduction-projects-lessons-learned-resource-conservation-district-tehama-county>.

Butte County RCD

- The PNF is just now receiving settlement funds from PG&E for the Camp Fire. They have \$91 million to be used in the Feather River ranger district. They are gauging how folks would like to see that money spent. We are enjoying participating in these conversations.

Plumas Corp

- Gia, we are doing a forest recovery project with the Plumas. The Tributaries Project will be scoping on February 7th. We also have lots of projects going on in the mountain meadows area. We just finished a big project on Mountain Meadows Creek. We are doing a lot of different plantings and growing our native riparian shrubs and trees. We will plant those in the fall of this coming year and spring of 2025.

Battle Creek Watershed Working Group

- The next meeting is on Tuesday, February 20th. We have submitted a grant application with Cal Trout, Trout Unlimited, American Rivers, and others for a Battle Creek restoration project. We are proposing some monitoring in preparation for PGE dam decommissioning.

Adjourn

The next meeting in March 2024