

**South Lassen Watersheds Group Meeting**  
**Tuesday, March 19th, 2024, 1:00-3:30 pm**

**Meeting Synopsis:**

In the March South Lassen Watersheds Group (SLWG) meeting, the collaborative heard updates, asked questions, and discussed three projects on the Lassen National Forest--Upper Butte Creek (UBC), West Lassen Headwaters (WLHP), and the Dixie Fire Community Protection Project. The group then broke out into small groups to discuss the draft West Lassen Headwaters Project Proposed Action, Purpose and Need (PAPN). After breakout groups, the group heard about proposed revisions to the SLWG MOU. The meeting concluded with updates on upcoming SLWG proposed (potential restoration within the WLHP and UBC) and planned work (meadow assessments funded by CDFW).

**Attendees:**

Allison Sanger - LNF	Leida Schoggen: Friends of Warner Valley
Barbara Andrews: Silver Lake HOA	Lorena Gorbet: Maidu Summit Consortium
Bella Bledsoe: Sierra Institute	Martha Davis: Silver Lake Homeowner
Bill Overland - LNF	Mary Davidge: Friends of Warner Valley
Bobby Howe - Collins Pine	Matt Barton: Friends of Warner Valley
Brad Underwood - Feather River RCD	Nikki Buckley: USFS
Cecily Sanchez - Sierra Institute	Patricia Puterbaugh: Lassen Forest Preservation Grp
Dan Ostmann: LAVO	Peggy Fulder: LAWG
Eddie Corwin	Phred Starkweather: Battle Creek Meadows Ranch
Emily Moloney - Cal Trout	Russell Nickerson: LNF
Faith Churchill: Butte County RCD	Ryan Burnett: Point Blue
Gwen Evans: Sierra Institute	Sophie Castleton: Sierra Institute
Helen Leiser: Collins	Stephaney Cox: LNF
Holly Swan: Cal Trout	Thomas Tisch: LAWG
Jim Richardson: Mineral Firewise	Trey Hiller: Battle Creek Watershed Working Group
Jason Kindopp: DWR	Tricia Bratcher: CDFW
Jonathan Kusel: Sierra Institute	Trinity Stirling: SNC
Kathryn Raeder: RCD of Tehama County	Vincent Vitale: Sierra Institute
Kurt Merino: Susanville Indian Rancheria	
Kristy Hoffman: SNC	
Kyle Rodgers: Sierra Institute	
Laura Corral: LNF	

**Meeting Opening**

The group made introductions and then moved to approve the agenda and past meeting minutes. The meeting minutes and agenda were approved.

**Upper Butte Creek**

- The Region is reviewing Backbone, UBC, and the WLHP for the California Spotted Owl-related forest plan amendments. We are probably two weeks out from scoping the WLHP. The RO has not yet put out an official direction. They are still working on it. We have been working with the NEPA planning group on looking at owl PACs, given that the spotted owl will likely be listed. Two weeks is the timeline they gave us for the official direction.
- We are working through some preliminary analysis on how the PACs are designed compared to the 2019 CA Spotted Owl Strategy. We may follow the framework, and not do a Forest Plan Amendment. We have not decided yet. There are tradeoffs to both. That is the main update. We are at a standstill. RO is looking at territories (not just PACs).
- Laura commented that the Region is still working on Backbone. That is delaying UBC. Russell thinks that two weeks is probably a reasonable estimate to have direction from the RO.

### **Dixie Fire Recovery Project**

- Russell: The Forest is expanding the project area based on scoping comments. The project will cover the whole Dixie Fire Footprint on all the Districts, with the exception of what is in UBC, WLHP, and some roadside projects. We are pulling together the PAPN with this adjusted footprint. We are hoping to scope that project in the next month--by April. The project will include all of what it had in the first document (Dixie Fire Recovery Project).
- The Dixie project won't be condition-based; maps will show site-specifics of what's being done and where.
- Q: What does it mean to prioritize around communities first? What is considered a community?
- A: Cabin tracts are included in WUI, so they will all be prioritized for treatment first as well. It will not just be large communities.
- Q: Will this revised scope have more explanation about the treatments in the WUI? As opposed to other areas.
- A- The project is not conditioned based so it will be more site specific. There will be maps that show general locations of the treatments.
- Jonathan: And there will be no emergency authorities used for this?
- Russell: I do not think so.
- Jonathan: So can you reiterate the difference from what will be scoped, and what was presented before?
- Russell: The size of the project is getting bigger. The same treatments that were discussed are the same. It will be more site-specific. More description and mapping of the treatments. A bit more detail this time around.

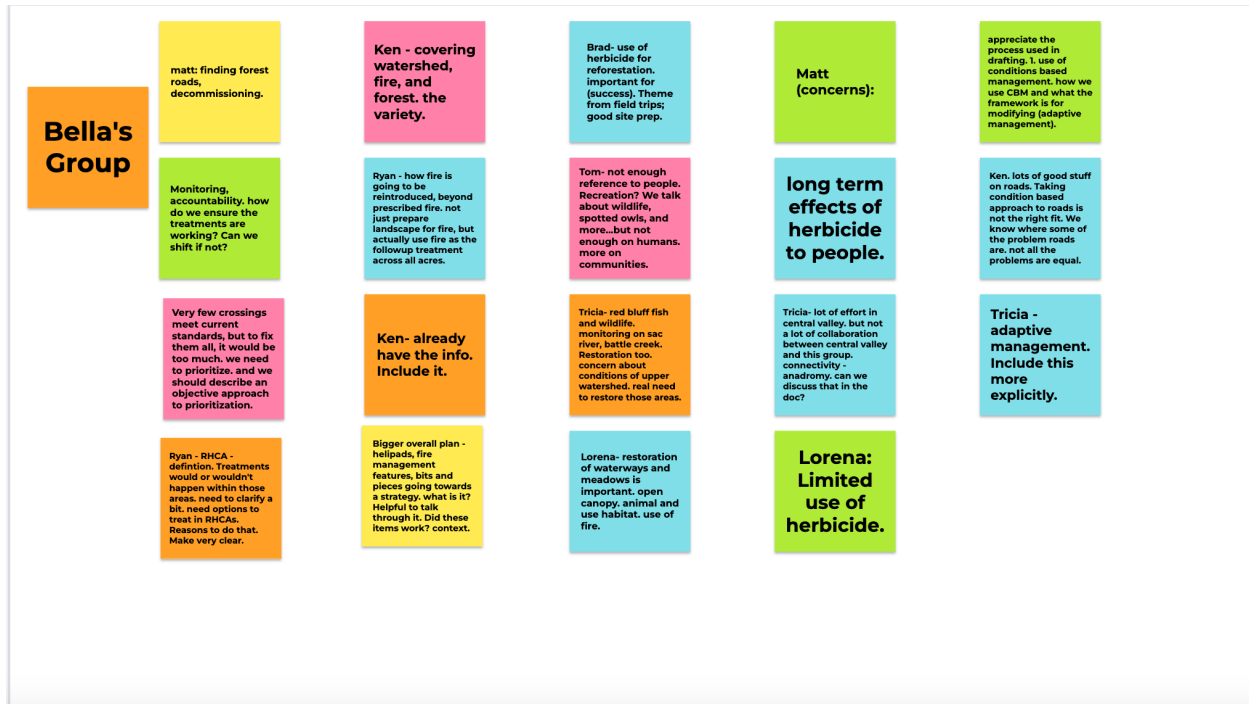
## Update from the Department of Water Resources on the Salmon Reintroduction Study

- Jason Kindopp updated the group on the feasibility study evaluating the potential for salmon reintroduction to the North Fork Feather River watershed above Lake Almanor.
- Chinook salmon aren't doing so well in the Valley, so DWR is looking at the possibility of reintroduction in these upper watersheds. DWR kick started last year with outreach to build partnerships so that if something does come from this study, there's collaboration for the implementation.
- **Area:** Above Chester, North Fork Feather River. There is quality habitat for spring-run Chinook and unique infrastructure for a watershed of this elevation. The existing infrastructure in the area would provide an opportunity to capture juveniles and truck them down to the lower watersheds.
- **Completed work:**
  - Planning/design: trap design; initial habitat evaluations; egg injections and egg-box deployment.
  - Field work: initial habitat evaluations; egg injection; trap deployment.
- The habitat evaluation was completed in 2023; this included initial assessments of the barriers and large-scale habitat surveys.
  - 2023 Barrier Assessment: Identified 6 complete fish passage barriers and 34 observed fish passage impediments (passable by adults).
  - Habitat summary: ample spawning and rearing habitat; barriers far up in watershed; potential for significant rearing habitat and holding pools; cold water temperatures and numerous springs
- Q: What protocol was used to assess habitat? A: Jason said he could circulate more on the protocol that was used.
- Q: How many eggs have been deployed? A: Deployed ~115,000 dyed-eggs (injection = ~65,000 eggs; egg boxed = ~48,000)
- Q: Is the intention to change anything in the habitat for the study?
- A: No, not right now. We are just studying the habitat potential. Early data of the egg incubation checks is showing about 45% survival. DWR also did not enclose boxes to ensure perfect impermeability - some salmon were able to escape and migrate downstream.
- Temperature profiles: Injected eggs in November; emergence is very slow because the water is very cold (as expected).
- DWR has finished egg inspections for this year. We will finish study plans and conduct model development for reintroduction scenarios. We are trying to continue to understand migration routing (e.g., super ditch or NF feather) and document emigration.
- DWR wants to take everything they learn, put it in a model, and gauge what they might witness in an actual implementation project.
- Q: Last couple years, good water years, are there any plans for any monitoring or surveys in dryer years to gauge habitat feasibility?

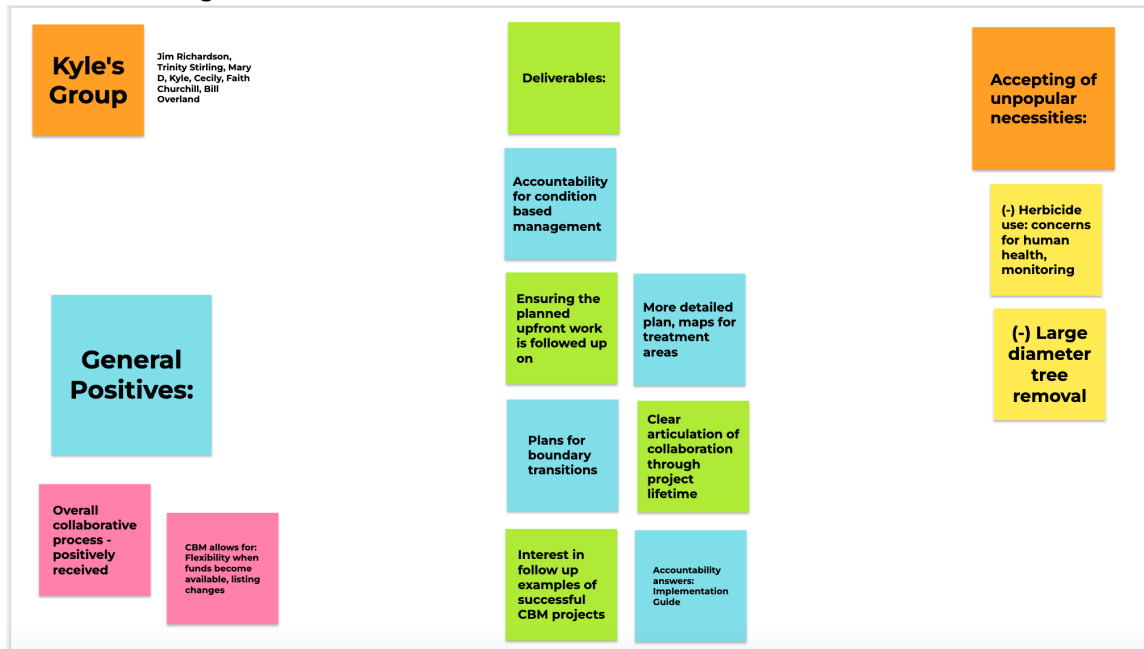
- A: The funding is through next year, they recognize these past years have been good for water. DWR is concentrating on that component but it is beyond the immediate scope of their work right now.

### **West Lassen Headwaters Project - Proposed Action, Purpose and Need**

- The Proposed Action, Purpose and Need document is a draft. It is not for circulation at this point. The document is undergoing the Regional Office review process, and making sure that projects and Forests are dealing with project level plan amendments consistently. We have SI and FS folks on calls with the Regional Office. The planning team will synthesize themes from today's breakout group discussion. But, we will also have the formal public comment period. We encourage folks to provide formal comments as well.
- Laura: A lot of this review has to do with the California Spotted Owl being listed. If we were going to amend the Forest Plan, we would have to use the whole 2019 owl strategy, not just part of it. We cannot use multiple plans. We need to pick one strategy or guidance to use. It cannot be language from both. Trish- Are you assuming that the RO might say, as long as you use the 2019 strategy, you are good to go? Russell- we have the 2004 framework, so if we use the 2019 strategy, it would be an amendment.
- Russell- We follow the 2004 framework as a Forest. The 2019 strategy is a compilation of the most recent science. If we use this strategy, to help the California Spotted Owl in the long term, it would not be in alignment with the 2004 framework. But the frameworks get old and it is not always in alignment with the most recent science.
- Jonathan: These upcoming breakout sessions are adding to the normal scoping period, but they are not in place of scoping.
  - PAPN Themes and Items of Concern (Breakout Rooms- 20 minutes)
    - *Facilitators: Jonathan, Bella, Vincent, Kyle*
    - What elements of the PAPN do you particularly like or think are important?
    - Are there items in the PAPN that you are concerned about?
    - What changes are needed that will best address these concerns?
    - What other information do you need?
  - Full Group Share Out:
  - Bella's group- we talked about needing a recursive process to monitor and evaluate throughout the project if we are using condition based management.



- Kyle- Our group discussed a couple big themes. 1. Skepticism around CBM. How can we account for gaps in that process? CBM - allows for flexibility when funds become available. Deliverables- accountability for CBM. Monitoring. Being more clear with articulation of collaboration throughout timeline. 2. Herbicide monitoring. We need to have checkpoints to ensure that we are doing good work.



- Vincent: Our group stressed the need for a definition on what forest resilience is. One of the thoughts around that definition, the ability of a system to recover after a disturbance.
- We also talked about how aggressive these treatments are going to be, and what the mosaic really looks like. Impacts should be anticipated with these treatments, especially where they are heavy and occur on steeper slopes.
- The prescription used for PACS- the language being proposed gives one the ability for a lot of latitude-more latitude than what was previously provided.
- Prescribed burning- the emphasis in the document on prescribed fire. Is prescribed burning being given the same latitude, or is it being something that is highly focused on. There is a strong focus on getting fire on the ground. There is potential for conflicts with the clean air act. If the NEPA is so focused on burning, do you run the risk of resistance-conflict with the clean air act? Document reads well. Collaborative work is very visible.



- Jonathan- Our group also had a discussion on CBM. Trish - implementation plan will help with this. This is cool, and something we have not seen before. Our group also had a discussion on Fire Management Features. Dan - 10% may be what is needed. Reforestation was discussed also. Watershed is a huge focus. Hydrological improvements should be done first. Great to have help with priorities (e.g., hydrological, recreation).
- Barb - one of the things not touched on much in the document is biological diversity. How much does biodiversity allow us to predict resilience? How do we manage biodiversity?

- Ryan- another purpose should be TEK, people, community. We need to make sure this is included.



**South Lassen Watersheds Group - Project Support Process (Bella, Vincent)**

- We are interested in doing MOU Revisions to ensure a Project Support Process is included.

## Project Support Process

Votes Available			
Disapproval (D)	Approval with Reservation (AR)	Full Approval (FA)	
Disapproval	Moderate Approval	Majority Approval	Full Approval
>20% vote "D"	<20% vote "D"	Votes exclusively "AR" and/or "FA"	100% vote "FA"
Disapproval	Moderate Approval	Majority Approval	Full Approval
The collaborative will work to halt or rework the project.	Group members may decide to oppose the project (e.g., appeal, litigate, or support outside challenges to the project).	Group members agree not to oppose the project and will make good faith efforts to offer alternative language or remedy issues.	Group members agree to actively advocate for project progress.

- What sort of support might there be for the larger project? The goal is to create a checkpoint for the group's pulse. What does the collective feel about the project?

### Updates: NFWF Proposal

- National Fish and Wildlife Proposal
- This NFWF proposal is a large, multi-partner, multi collaborative effort that supports projects connected with this collaborative, as well as the Eagle Lake Partnership, and Burney Hat Creek.
- Specifics for this group:
  - The proposal would include funding for the UBC project. This would include reforestation, the realignment of the Humbug Summit road, and restoration of the meadow it runs through.
  - For WLHP: this would include crossing upgrades at Lost creek and Nanny creek, and priority acres for thinning, most likely around Mineral.

### Partner Updates

- **Sierra Nevada Conservancy:** Thanks for comments on our strategic plan.
  - In our most recent grant round we awarded a few local projects - Ishi Wilderness Planning (LNF/RCD of Tehama County), Taylorsville Community Defense Zone Implementation (Sierra Institute), Vegetation Assessment Project, which includes many counties (Fall River RCD).
- **RCD of Tehama County:** Ishi Wilderness Planning grant was awarded by SNC. We are applying for funds for work in Mineral.
- **Butte County RCD:** Conducting Rx fire around the county; we are also leading a tour in Cohasset of masticated units.
- **Lassen Volcanic National Park:** The upcoming pile burning focus will be near Juniper Lake.
- **Maidu Summit Consortium:** Logging Jamboree at Chester Park on June 1st; Roundhouse Council Ribbon Cutting on June 20th.
- **Battle Creek Meadows Ranch:** Signed contracts with the RCD to start a three year project near SPI and LNF land.

### Adjourn

June Field Tour