

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

Attendees:

Andy Trent – US Fish and Wildlife Service
Allison Sanger – Lassen National Forest
Barbara Andrews – Silver Lake HOA
Betsy Karle – Mill Creek HOA
Bella Bledsoe – Sierra Institute
Cecily Sanchez – Sierra Institute
Colt Brockman – DWR
Conner Swift – Pacific Crest Trail Association
Doug Peters – Lassen National Forest
Emily Moloney – Cal Trout
Evan MacKinnon – DWR
Faith Churchill – Butte County RCD
Hannah Mone – NMFS
Heather Reineking – Sierra Institute
Heidi Van Gieson – Lassen National Forest
Janie Ackley – Lassen National Forest
Jake Blaufuss – American Forest Resource
Council
Jaydene – Mill Creek
Jim Richardson – Mineral Firewise
Jonathan Fitch – SPI
Jonathan Kusel – Sierra Institute
Karissa Bridges – USFWS
Ken Roby – Feather River Trout Unlimited
Kiersten Dolecki – Sierra Institute

Kurt Merino – Susanville Indian Rancheria
Kyle Rodgers – Sierra Institute
Laura Corral – Lassen National Forest
Lorena Gorbet – Maidu Summit Consortium
Mary Davidge – Friends of Warner Valley
Matt Barton – Friends of Warner Valley
Michael Hall – Feather River RCD
Mike Klimeck – LAVO
Patrick Jarrett
Peggy Fulder – LAWG
Phred Starkweather – Battle Creek Meadows
Ranch
Russell Nickerson – Lassen National Forest
Ryan Burnett – Point Blue
Sophie Castleton – Sierra Institute
Thomas Tisch – LAWG
Tuli Potts – Sierra Nevada Conservancy
Trey Hiller – Battle Creek Watershed Working
Group
Tricia Bratcher – CDFW
Trinity Stirling – SNC
Vincent Vitale – Sierra Institute
Will Kingori
Wolfy Rougle – Butte County RCD
Zach Browning – Sierra Institute

Meeting Synopsis:

In the December South Lassen Watersheds Group (SLWG) meeting, the collaborative heard updates, asked questions, and discussed three projects on the Lassen National Forest currently in the planning phase. Updates were provided on the Upper Butte Creek, Dixie Fire Restoration, and West Lassen Headwaters projects, including recent developments and timelines. The group also received updates on implementation activities within the Emergency Authority footprint of the West Lassen Headwaters Project. Finally, the meeting included a discussion on agency and partner responses to the Park Fire, including post-fire recovery efforts and ongoing collaboration with stakeholders.

Meeting Opening

The SLWG approved the meeting agenda.

Lassen National Forest Project Updates

Upper Butte Creek Update (Wolfy):

- The Draft EA for Upper Butte Creek is in progress. Specialists are finalizing their reports, and the wildlife team is having weekly meetings to develop the Biological Assessment (BA) and Biological Evaluation (BE).
- Lassen National Forest has recently hired a new resource manager.
- The goal is to go out to public comment by early March. There is a discussion about potentially using an EAD to remove the objection period, which would help speed up the decision by 90 days.
- No major changes to the proposed action, other than making CSO provisions compliant with Regional direction.

Questions and Discussion:

- **Jake:** When will the EA go out for public comment?
 - **Wolfy:** Early March.
- **Matt:** If an EAD is used, does that eliminate the objection period? Can anyone still object?
 - **Wolfy:** Yes, it removes the objection period, and the project would go directly to a decision. However, people can still challenge the decision in court.
- **Trey:** What types of legal actions might be taken, and who could potentially sue?
 - **Wolfy:** Groups concerned about tree removal intensity, CSO habitat, and old-growth maintenance could pursue litigation. Legal action would require showing that a law or policy was violated.

Dixie Fire Restoration Project Update (Russell):

- GBI will be writing reports for specialists. Reports will be drafted in February and finalized by March.
- **Jake:** Where did GBI's funding come from?
 - **Russell:** Funding was provided through the Dixie Disaster Supplemental.
- **Jonathan Kusel:** How are public comments being incorporated so far and moving forward?
 - **Russell:** Most community engagement will come from the Forest Service once the analysis period concludes.
- **Mary:** Can we get a clearer understanding of how public comments have influenced the project?
 - **Russell:** We address large-scale comment themes in the document, but we don't release a detailed summary of changes made based on public feedback.

West Lassen Headwaters Project Update (Sophie):

- The boundary of the West Lassen Headwaters Project covers 101,000 acres of Forest Service land.
- The Park Fire burned into the project area, impacting about 43% of the footprint.
- The Public Scoping Period has concluded, and a team meeting will be held next week to analyze and address comments.

- The project is considering an EAD, with the goal of issuing a signed decision within the next year.
- **Project Goals:** Improve forest resilience, restore watershed health, and improve strategic fire management.
 - The project includes vegetation treatments, fire management features, helipads, and 120 miles of roadside treatment, along with reforestation in areas affected by the Dixie and Park Fires.

Emergency Authority in the West Lassen Headwaters Project (Russell, Sophie):

- Emergency Authority allows for implementation of roughly 4,000 acres of treatment before completing the full NEPA process. The goal is to have these acres implemented by September 2025 to protect remaining green forests in fire-affected areas.
- Piling is complete on the eastern side of the project, and larger piles are being burned.
- **Buffer Zones:** 500 ft buffer around private land in Mineral and McGowan Lake, and 200 ft buffer along roads.
- **Phred:** Is there a log sale as part of the scope?
 - **Russell:** Yes, we're looking at small log sales (200 acres each).
- **Emily:** Are there emergency actions to protect stream habitats?
 - **Russell:** Typical protections, such as clearing culverts, will be in place, and all NEPA standards will be followed.
- **Betsy:** Can we improve communication on who is doing what during implementation?
 - **Russell:** On the post-Park Fire cleanup, the FS is mostly done for now. PG&E and Caltrans are working on hazard tree removal and road treatments. Some contractor details are still unclear.

Jake: Is the Lassen National Forest satisfied with the new hazard tree abatement models?

- **Russell:** Yes, the model is working well and meeting our needs, though some adjustments have been made in certain areas.

Post-Park Fire Recovery Efforts

BAER (Burned Area Emergency Response):

- The Forest Service's BAER team conducts immediate assessments following fire containment, focusing on areas that could be further damaged by storms or winter weather.
- **Funding:** The Park Fire BAER funding request was for \$800,000, and \$500,000 has been approved.
 - ¾ of the funding will go toward road treatments (clearing culverts, gravel application, rolling dips).
 - Additional funds have been approved for botany work, gates, and signs.
 - All BAER funds must be used within one year of fire containment.

BARR (Burned Area Rehabilitation and Restoration) Program:

- A new BARR category addresses areas unlikely to recover naturally.

- A proposal was submitted to BARR, including requests for hazardous material cleanup, weather station repairs, spawning gravel augmentation, and reforestation needs.
- **BARR Funds:** These funds must be used within 3 years of fire containment and are competitive, with requests submitted to the regional office.

Sophie: Will the Forest Service share the full BARR proposal?

- **Russell:** We won't share the entire proposal, but we can discuss the general items included.

Jonathan Kusel: How are priorities set for BARR funding requests?

- **Russell:** The priority is on public signage, road treatments, and accessibility.

Partner Updates

Sierra Nevada Conservancy:

- Prop 4 passed, and grant rounds will begin next year.

Sierra Institute:

- Progress on cross-laminated timber facility, 30-40% of funding secured.
- West Lassen Headwaters PAPN released, with the NFFRP in its objection period until December 23rd.
- Plumas NF leading contracting around Greenville.
- Meadow restoration completed at Swain Meadow and Robbers Creek.

Butte County RCD:

- First phase of Butte Creek House Meadow completed.
- Colby Mountain Trails project broke ground, with a few miles of trail completed before snow.

Lassen Volcanic National Park:

- Overhaul of fire management plan, EA route expected next year.
- New fuels specialists to be hired.
- Hazardous tree work at Mooretown Rancheria ongoing.

Point Blue:

- Childs Meadow implementation nearly complete.
- Project cost: \$2 million, funded by CDFW, WCB, and CAL FIRE through Sierra Institute.

Maidu Summit Consortium:

- The Beaver relocation project was successful, with 12 beavers relocated.
- Wetland purchased by Westwood at Delwood Street.

Mineral and Mill Creek:

- The RCD's tree thinning project was completed, with 2,022 large trees cut.
- New grant awarded, awaiting contractor bid.

Meeting Adjourned