

Eastern Sierra Climate & Communities Resilience Project

March 10, 2022

Meeting Synopsis

1. Welcome and Introductions

This was our 10th and final meeting of the stakeholder building series supported by Sierra Nevada Conservancy. A huge thank you to everyone who helped to get this project off the ground!

2. Inyo National Forest Climate Change Trend Summary Presentation

Acting Regional Ecologist for the USFS Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), Dr. Marc Meyer, presented on the recently published 2021 Inyo National Forest Climate Change Trend Summary. The presentation and associated paper provide insight to help us, as stakeholders, understand current and future projected patterns in climate and their effects on natural resources. We have opted to make the INF Climate Change Trend Summary Presentation video recording and presentation pdf available on the [ESCCRP Stakeholder Information](#) webpage.

3. Operational Resilience in Western US Frequent-Fire Forests Presentation

Ecologist at the USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station and Associate Professor of Forest Ecology at UC Davis, Dr. Malcolm North, presented on his recently published paper, Operational Resilience in western US frequent-fire forests. The video recording and presentation pdf are also available on the ESCCRP Stakeholder Information webpage.

An applied example from Butte County was provided as a follow-up to the meeting presentations. After experiencing the devastating impacts of the 2018 Camp Fire, the Butte County community came together to plan recovery effort for their forests. Through a collaborative effort, they established the [Butte Forested Watersheds Plan](#), which is the community's vision for the "next forest" and provides a road map for working toward a healthy and resilient landscape.

The ten goals for forest health from the Butte Forested Watersheds Plan:

What the Next Forest is Like

1. The next forest is built to burn.
2. The next forest is a mosaic.
3. The next forest will thrive in the next climate.
4. The next forest has good water quality & quantity.
5. The next forest has lots of herbivores.

How We'll Get There

6. We will transition from projects to programs
7. We will build up Tribal capacity.
8. We will develop biomass capacity.
9. We'll become cross-boundary-project experts.
10. We will create a rural culture that's fire-positive.

4. Proposed Actions Q&A

The Group was presented with an opportunity to ask any follow-up questions as a part of internal scoping on the ESCCRP Proposed Actions that INF Forester Stephen Calkins presented to the Group at the Feb 10 Stakeholder Meeting.

Q: How will treatment prescriptions be impacted by the potential ESA listing of the Whitebark pine?

A: The INF team is working through this right now. The proposed listing calls out forest health treatments as an overall benefit to the species. The beneficial actions for the Whitebark will still need to go through the consultation process with US Fish and Wildlife. Even though some individual trees may be removed through the forest health treatments, the work is viewed as an overall benefit to the species and integral to the long-term preservation of the species.

Q: The town just received a letter that the Camp High Sierra parcel was nominated as an important cultural site; how will this affect the work that is planned for the site?

A: This is new information to the ESCCRP staff, and at this time, we do not have an answer on how this will impact the planned work. The Forest Service explained the nature of the listing and what aspects of the site are being referenced in the nomination will influence how the planned work may be impacted. ESCCRP staff will work with the landowner and the State Historic Preservation Office to understand the implications of this nomination to the planned fuels reduction work.

INF Forester, Stephen Calkins, provided a summary of the Proposed Actions timeline:

- Present- INF staff is working to finalize the Proposed Actions
- August 2022- goal for the public scoping period
- October 2022 through Winter- develop alternatives & finalize the analysis area
- Spring 2023- goal for the public comment period
- Summer 2023- incorporate edits and finalize
- May 2024- the record of decision

5. Meeting Wrap-Up and Next Steps

a. Future Correspondence

A poll was presented to the Group to inquire how stakeholders would prefer to receive updates moving forward now that we no longer need to meet on a monthly basis. We will opt to have a *meeting/newsletter hybrid* moving forward based on the poll results. We plan on hosting a Stakeholder field trip/meeting in the project area this summer. Keep an eye out for more information via email.

The ESCCRP staff is transitioning to the Whitebark Institute at the end of March, and future correspondence will be coming from @whitebarkinstitute.org email addresses.

To demonstrate a high-level overview of where we are at in the project and aid with progress updates, we developed an [ESCCRP Progress Tracking Dashboard](#). For suggestions or improvements to the dashboard, please reach out to kelsey@whitebarkinstitute.org.

b. Acknowledgments

A huge thank you to the Sierra Nevada Alliance and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy for providing capacity resources through the [Sierra Corp Fellowship Program](#) as this project was getting off the ground. Kelsey is finishing her Forestry Fellowship in the upcoming weeks and will be transitioning with the ESCCRP staff to continue this work at the Whitebark Institute.

Another big thank you to **Plumas Corporation** for the intuitional backing that they have provided to the ESCCRP staff to address the needs of the eastern Sierra during the initial planning phases. It was this initial act of generosity on behalf of the Plumas Corporation

that lead to this new momentum and capacity building in the eastern Sierra. That type of generosity is how meaningful relationships are built, trust is established, and collaboration is achieved. The eastern Sierra will be forever in debt to the Plumas Corporation for their vision and supporting actions to build capacity across the entire Sierra Nevada.

Last but far from least, thank you to all the stakeholders for being a part of the collaborative effort to put the eastern Sierra on the path to achieving regional resilience.

c. GROUP UPDATES!

Due to time constraints, this section was not discussed at the meeting, so we are providing you written updates below to keep you informed on what's happening next on the ESCCRP. Updates are organized by focal area used to perform the Needs Assessment. The Needs Assessment is currently being finalized by our Staff and will be available upon completion to those stakeholders interested. A summary format will also be produced for a brief snapshot of the more comprehensive Needs Assessment document and will be housed on the project website.

Outreach & Education:

- Whitebark Institute is **hiring** an Outreach & Education Coordinator with the intent to onboard in May.
- We will commence **community outreach efforts** this Spring so keep an eye out for emails from the Whitebark Team (new staff and old) about upcoming events.
- We recently received notice that our application to **UCSB's Bren School for Environmental Science, master's in environmental communications** program was successful. This means we will have a team of three graduate students this spring helping us by conducting a "listening tour" in our local Community that will help us target our outreach and education messaging. We may request that some of you talk with the students while they are conducting their initial research.

Sustainable Funding:

- We are in the early stages of establishing a **Financial Advisory Team** to begin working on the Sustainable Funding Work Plan task from our Needs Assessment. This team will consist of a few high-level staff from each of our project beneficiaries. We are aiming to host an initial meeting with this team sometime in late May.

Biomass Utilization:

- TSS Consultants have been retained to assist in the identification of an appropriately scaled Biomass utilization facility that can serve the Eastern Sierra in the long term, given anticipated feedstock supplies generated by the ESCCRP. The acquisition of necessary technical information is underway so that a side-by-side comparison of each of the available technologies can be made. We expect a meeting in late May or early June with our Biomass Ad Hoc Team to discuss appropriate technology selection.

Workforce Development:

- We are gaining exciting momentum on a **USDA RISE grant** opportunity with Inyo County to support forestry sector **workforce development** in line with our Forestry Workforce Development Work Plan. Partners include Cerro Coso Community College,

Owens Valley Career Development Center, ICOE, Inyo County Economic Development, and Sierra Business Council. If awarded, this grant, would support the new Business Resource Center (BRC) in Bishop which will provide support and guidance for local businesses interested in joining the forestry sector, as well as provide a comprehensive training and accreditation pathway for local residents who want to build their skills to be eligible for forestry and wildland fire jobs in the eastern Sierra. Stay tuned for future updates on this grant.

Prioritization:

- Spatial Informatics Group (SIG) has been working steadily with many stakeholders to get local input on location and prioritization of High Value Resource Assets within the Project Area (HVRAs). Beginning with the built environment and critical infrastructure that supports the TOML and it's assets, SIG will also consider Tier 2 priorities as allowable until the 10,000 priority acres have been identified.

Research and Monitoring:

- Monitoring Plan development for the ESCCRP will be performed by the Environmental Planning consultant selected to handle the NEPA planning and surveys on the 10,000 priority acres.

Operations:

- Whitebark Institute is **hiring** a Project Manager to aid in the oversight of project implementation with the intent to onboard in May.
- We are still working to determine a start day for the planned implementation work on the **486 acres in Reds Meadow and the Sherwin Creek** areas this summer. We are hoping to be able to begin work in early June. That work should last approximately 6 weeks. Look for the signs at the Mammoth Visitor Center and other strategic locations about California Climate Investment projects being funded in the local area.
- Initial steps have been taken to begin establishing necessary **agreements** with MMSA and TOML for the **non-federal units** funded in Phase I Implementation (80 acres). A Registered Professional Forester will be hired to perform **CEQA and develop treatment prescriptions on the non-federal units**. Depending on CEQA timing, we may be able to implement in the Fall of this year (TBD).

NEPA Planning:

- The RFP for environmental Planning Services is out and is scheduled to close Monday, March 21, 2022. Once closed, the **ESCOG** will convene a selection committee to hire the **Third-Party IDT** that will take on their first task under the ESCOG's Eastern Sierra Pace & Scale Accelerator to perform NEPA for the ESCCRP and supporting survey work on our 10,000 priority acres.