

Eastern Sierra Climate & Communities Resilience Project

November 18, 2021

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome and Introductions

a. Attendees

- Allan Pietrasanta, Sierra Business Council
- Andrew Mulford, Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access
- Betty Hylton, Mammoth Community Water District
- Carol Blanchette, Valentine Eastern Sierra Reserves
- Elaine Kabala, Eastern Sierra Council of Governments
- Erin Noesser, Inyo National Forest
- Genevieve Cross, Southern California Edison
- Holly Alpert, Eastern California Water Association
- Janet Hatfield, Plumas Corp.
- Jason Wingard, Inyo National Forest
- Jeannie Habben, Madera County
- Kelsey Glastetter, Plumas Corp.
- Malcolm Clark, Sierra Club
- Marc Meyer, USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station
- Monica Buhler, Devils Postpile National Monument
- Nathan Sill, Inyo National Forest
- Rebecca Carr Wong, Devils Postpile National Monument
- Rick Kattelmann, Plumas Corp. & Eastern California Water Association
- Ron Tucker, LADWP
- Stephen Calkins, Inyo National Forest
- Taro Pusina, Spatial Informatics Group
- Tom Hodges, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area
- Tom Schaniel, Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District

2. Group Updates

a. Project Milestone Updates

Infrastructure Bill: A five-year, \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill was recently passed by Congress. The legislation includes \$3.3 billion for wildfire risk reduction and \$2.1 billion for ecological restoration, the bill also addresses a multitude of other wildland fire issues. This is BIG NEWS and is a major step towards better positioning the Inyo National Forest to manage the necessary work in the eastern Sierra. We hope that our comprehensive needs assessment will serve as a valuable tool to advocate the need for funding to be allocated to the Inyo National Forest to contribute financially to the ESCCRP. To view brief overview summaries about this legislation, check out these links:

- <https://forestpolicypub.com/2021/09/03/infrastructure-bill-billion-for-wildfire-forest-management/>

- <https://wildfiretoday.com/2021/11/06/congress-appropriates-3-3-billion-for-wildland-fire/>

CDFW Grant: CDWF and the ESCOG have executed the grant agreement for *The Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator*. The ESCOG has circulated a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Project Management and Project Implementation Preparation Services. The proposal submission deadline is November 19, 2021. A decision to select the contractor for these services is Dec. 10, 2021.

Launch of the Whitebark Institute: Out of recognition of the need for a local team of people dedicated to community wildfire protection and forest health projects in the eastern Sierra, The Whitebark Institute (Whitebark) submitted a proposal to the ESCOG's solicitation. Holly Alpert, the Executive Director of Whitebark spoke briefly to the group and mentioned that Whitebark is currently looking for a Non-Profit Administrator. If you know anybody who may be interested, please share Holly's contact (holly@whitebarkinstitute.org) so they can reach out for more information.

CAL FIRE Grant: CAL FIRE and the Inyo National Forest (INF) are still awaiting the *ESCCRP: Phase 1 Implementation* grant agreement execution as it is currently tied up in legal discussions in Washington DC. An RFP for the implementation work to occur in Summer 2022 has been circulated as securing contractors for thinning operations needs to be done well in advance of when the work needs to be completed. A contractor site visit was conducted to tour the approximate 500 acres and four contractors attended. Due to the turnout at the site visit, we anticipate receiving 2-4 bids. The proposal submission deadline is also November 19, 2021.

NFWF Grant: The NFWF grant, funded to CalTrout to solve for biomass removal, has completed the feedstock assessment summary. TSS Consultants has been working with CalTrout and project partners to understand the feedstock supply in bone dry tons (BDTs) available. BDT is a unit of weight measuring 2,000 pounds of woody materials at 0% moisture content. In 2013, TSS Consultants conducted a study for Mono County and estimated an available 5,319 BDTs. The 2021 study estimates 24,000 BDTs to be practically available. To put that into perspective, 15 BDTs is approximately equivalent to a truck with a 40 ft long trailer filled with chips. Meaning that according to the 2021 study, the annual feedstock supply is approximately 1,600 truckloads a year. With this number of BDTs, there is a wider variety of technologies available for biomass removal. The next step is for TSS Consultants to begin evaluation of appropriate technologies and to consult with the Biomass Ad Hoc Focal Team to help arrive at a decision to move this forward.

Wildfire Resilience Insurance: The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Willis Tower Watson (WTW) have been doing recent research on whether it is possible to capture insurance savings from lower risks to wildfire due to fuels treatments. Studies show that fire-adapted communities have a lower risk of damage, and less risk of damage suggests less risk of loss to insurers. TNC and WTW are investigating whether lower risks to insurers can translate to more policy options and lower premiums. They see the potential for the Mammoth region to serve as a pilot project for their wildfire resilience insurance. TNC and WTW have been in communication with various ESCCRP stakeholders and community organizations to learn if

Mammoth and the ESCCRP meet the baseline standard to serve as a pilot location for further research.

To learn more visit the links to the [summary](#) and [full report](#) that TNC and WTW recently published on wildfire resilience insurance.

On the topic of wildfire risk, a Zoom poll was conducted with our stakeholder group to assess the perception of wildfire risk in our project area.

Question: What is the likelihood of a fire in any given year?

Results:



b. SCALE Meeting

The Sierra Institute orchestrates the Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement (SCALE) project as a mechanism for collaboration between stakeholder groups working on landscape-scale forest restoration and community improvement across California. The Sierra Institute recently hosted its Fall SCALE meeting over the course of two days and our ESCCRP staff attended. The meeting reflected on some of the major fires in California’s recent history and some of the major takeaways are as follows:

Dixie Fire (2021): In Lassen National Park, they experienced very little high severity fire and a lot of beneficial fire during the Dixie Fire. Over the last 20 years, they have been successful with managing natural fires within the park. A message to the group was that having fire on the landscape is a critical component of preparing our landscapes to be resilient in the future. Another point made was that our ability to become a fire culture is going to make or break us; we need to learn to live with good fire so we can avoid catastrophic outcomes. Additionally, they communicated the need for California to start thinking about defensible space in miles instead of feet if we want to protect our communities.

Camp Fire (2018): In Butte County, three years after the Camp Fire they are observing 80% mortality in untreated areas in their forests and 80% survivorship in areas that have undergone treatment. This is a testament that fuels treatments are a worthwhile investment. The Butte County representative expressed that climate impacts are compounding the problem faster than they had anticipated. They are seeking to treat 20,000 acres annually and are prioritizing developing shelter in place zones for community members to take refuge in the case of future wildfires.

Tamarack Fire (2021): A member of the Washoe Tribe spoke to the impacts of the Tamarack Fire on culturally important land. The Tamarack fire burned traditional gathering sites used to collect pine nuts for generations. With the loss of these cultural gathering spots, several generations to come will not have the opportunity to participate in the cultural activities at these sites as it takes 30 years from when a seedling grows into a fruit-bearing tree. Impacts to cultural resources, such as what happened to the Washoe pine nut gathering sites in the Tamarack Fire, are ecosystem service benefits that often go unquantified in vulnerability assessments.

Rim Fire (2013): The Yosemite-Stanislaus region was heavily impacted by the Rim Fire, which was at the time considered the first “megafire”. The Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions (YSS) is a collaborative established in the wake of the Rim Fire to address restoration needs and promote healthy forests. The YSS has \$100 million in shovel-ready projects and is waiting for funding from the Federal and State governments to implement. This is an example of the competitive nature of applying to grants as there are projects planned and shovel-ready awaiting funding.

The need for sustained funding by the State was identified but, at present, there are no certainties with how much funding is available on a year-to-year basis. This demonstrates the critical need for a sustainable funding plan for the ESCCRP which does not rely solely on grants.

3. Needs Assessment Ad Hoc Team Presentations

A brief overview of the work plans presented is provided below. The meeting provided an opportunity for the overall stakeholder group to offer input on the work plans presented. The team leaders will work to incorporate comments suggested in the stakeholder meeting into their topic’s work plan. Final drafts of work plans will be compiled and submitted to SNC as a deliverable under the scope of our current grant agreement in 2022.

a. Rx Fire Workforce Plan Presentation

The purpose of the Rx Fire Ad Hoc Focal Team is to advocate the need for building prescribed fire capacity in the Eastern Sierra and identify the steps to develop a local workforce capable of meeting the prescribed fire needs of the region. With wildland fires becoming more likely, larger, and more intense, we must employ a suite of mechanical *and* prescribed fire treatments to proactively counter negative wildfire effects.

Historically, prescribed fire challenges included risk aversion, lack of funding, concerns surrounding air quality/smoke, politics, media and public (mis)perception, lack of incentive and support, and numerous other challenges. To address the inherited prescribed fire

challenges, the Rx Fire Ad Hoc Focal Team developed a work plan to alleviate challenges and barriers. The plan includes convening a prescribed fire workforce planning team to develop Rx goals, identify capacity needs, improve prescribed burn planning capacity, develop sustainable programs and actions, and adaptively manage prescribed fire treatments.

Taro Pusina had to sign off the meeting immediately after his presentation. Although no questions or comments were voiced before he had to leave, we would like to extend the opportunity to provide input due to the time constraint in the meeting. If desired, contact Taro (tpusina@sig-gis.com) with your questions, comments, or input.

b. Forest Restoration Workforce Development Work Plan Presentation

The purpose of the Forest Restoration Workforce Development Ad Hoc Focal Team is to improve understanding of current barriers and uncertainties relevant to forestry sector workforce needs in the Eastern Sierra and work with partners to seek solutions that incentivize local business development.

The Forest Restoration Workforce plan includes assembling a team to eliminate uncertainties and barriers about future work in the eastern Sierra to give confidence to local contractors to grow their businesses. The plan acknowledges specific local tribal workforce opportunities and needs. The plan also recognizes the need to identify capacity gaps and build relations with reputable contractors to achieve desired future capacity needs.

With both the Forest Restoration Workforce plan and the Rx Fire Workforce plan, we are working to identify what our local immediate needs are in the context of making the ESCCRP a success. As expressed by a stakeholder, we are encouraged by the Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF) which is a statewide push to support planning and implementation of regional economic strategy.

c. Research & Monitoring Work Plan Presentation

The purpose of the Research & Monitoring Ad Hoc Focal Team is to identify knowledge gaps, research opportunities, and opportunities to gain knowledge that could inform later stages of the project and broadly benefit forest restoration and management elsewhere in the Sierra Nevada.

The Research & Monitoring plan illuminates opportunities the ESCCRP presents to gain knowledge in a variety of fields. The landscape scale of the ESCCRP allows for research projects which are not possible at the plot scale. The various types of research and monitoring posed in the work plan include administrative monitoring, long-term monitoring with scientific objects, and experimental research within the context of the ESCCRP.

No comments were provided from the stakeholder group on the Research & Monitoring work plan.

4. Meeting Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Due to the holidays and some groups needing additional time to prepare for work plan presentations, we have opted to restructure and not hold a December stakeholder meeting. We will resume meetings on the second Thursday of each month 1-3 PM starting in January 2022.

Below is the tentative schedule:

a. January 13th

- Prioritization
- Finance & Marketing

b. February 10th

- Proposed Actions

c. March 10th

- Wrap-up of any outstanding items

After March 2022, we anticipate transitioning to a quarterly stakeholder meeting schedule with meetings in January, April, July, and October maintaining the second Thursday 1-3 PM timeslot. We hope to hold a group field trip in the project area annually during the July meeting.

Lastly, some exciting media to check out:

- 11/12 Science Friday Podcast featuring our forest ecologist, Dr. Marc Meyer
<https://www.sciencefriday.com/segments/fires-west-climate-change/>
- A new research paper on wildfire response to changing daily temperature extremes in California's Sierra Nevada and the accompanying NY Times article
<https://www.science.org/doi/epdf/10.1126/sciadv.abe6417>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/17/climate/climate-change-wildfire-risk.html>