

Eastern Sierra Climate & Communities Resilience Project

April 15, 2021

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome & Introductions

a. Attendees

- Allan Pietrasanta, Sierra Business Council
- Andrew Mulford, Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access
- Betty Hylton, Mammoth Community Water District
- Bob Gardener, Mono County
- Brett Storey, Placer County
- Britta Dyer, American Forests
- Chance Callahan, Eastern California Water Association
- Chance Traub, Inyo National Forest
- Elaine Kabala, ESCOG
- Erin Noesser, Inyo National Forest
- Gordon Martin, Inyo National Forest
- Holly Alpert, Eastern California Water Association
- Janet Hatfield, Plumas Corp.
- John Wentworth, Town of Mammoth Lakes
- Kelsey Glastetter, Plumas Corp.
- Ken Brengle, Mammoth Lakes Chamber of Commerce
- Kim Cooke, Town of Mammoth Lakes
- Lynn Boulton, Sierra Club
- Malcolm Clark, Sierra Club
- Marc Meyer, USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station
- Matt Driscoll, Sierra Nevada Conservancy
- Natalie Morrow, Mammoth Lakes Fire Department
- Nathan Sill, Inyo National Forest
- Neil Chapman, Flagstaff Fire Department/Summit Fire & Medical District
- Rick Kattelmann, Plumas Corp. & Eastern California Water Association
- Ron Tucker, LADWP
- Sarah Di Vittorio, National Forest Foundation
- Scott Kusumoto, USFS
- Stacy Corless, Mono County
- Stephen Calkins, Inyo National Forest
- Steve Baule, LADWP
- Todd Ellsworth, USFS
- Tom Schaniel, Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District

2. Previous Meetings Synopsis/Agenda Overview

a. Previous Meetings Synopsis

A brief overview of the previous ESCCRP stakeholder meetings was provided. Key task components of the previous meetings included:

- i. November 2020-* project kickoff and review of tasks funded by SNC grant
- ii. January 2021-* boundary edits & introduction of draft project goals
- iii. February 2021-* no meeting due to ESCCRP staff preparing CDFW grant proposal
- iv. March 2021-* project goals discussion continued, introduction of draft objectives, and multi-jurisdictional land inclusion discussion

b. Today's Agenda

A group of guests from similar scale forest health projects were invited to tell us about their projects and share lessons learned thus far. Through learning about these parallel projects, their processes, and overcoming of challenges, we hope to propel our group forward as we embark on our next project task: The Needs Assessment.

3. Panel Discussion: Lessons Learned from Landscape Scale Restoration Projects across the West

The panelists:

- *Sarah Di Vittorio-* **Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership**-TCSI, National Forest Foundation, Northern California Program Manager
- *Brett Storey-* **French Meadows Watershed Health Project**-TCSI, Placer County, Principal Management Analyst
- *Neil Chapman-* **Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project**-4FRI, Flagstaff Fire Department/Summit Fire & Medical District, Forest Health Supervisor

The discussion commenced with each panelist introducing their project, providing background on their organization's role in the project, and a synopsis of their project timeline and where they are currently in the process. Following project introductions, the panelists dove deeper to share lessons learned, pivotal events that shifted the momentum of the projects, and how each project measures success. Listed below is a synopsis of lessons shared by each panelist.

Q: What do you consider the most significant lessons learned thus far working on your project?

A: Sarah Di Vittorio, Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership (LTW):

1. Build a common vision for the landscape: LTW used the early phases, the Landscape Resilience Assessment and Landscape Restoration Strategy, to develop a common vision and understanding of the landscape and to build agreement of the restoration needs and approaches.
2. Target science where it is needed the most: LTW did great science that was informative, helped shape their strategy, and will help with future environmental documents, but it also bogged the group down. The saturation of science seemed to take away from their ability to keep stakeholders engaged. Think carefully about what science you really need and target your resources and time there.
3. The Collaborative Process:
 - a. Make sure that the group's expectations are aligned and realistic.
 - b. Do not make your process more complicated than it needs to be, keep it simple.

Collaboration in these big landscape projects is super time consuming. People devote a lot of their time and can get burned out. If LTW could do it over again, they would more strategically target the collaborative effort. They would identify the intensive collaboration pieces, really think about where consensus was needed, and then focus the collaborative process in those areas.

A: Brett Storey, French Meadows Watershed Health Project (FMP)

1. Select Key Stakeholders with Care: FMP was able to bring together a group of agencies that had a balanced approach, knowledge of what needed to be done in the forest, access to funding, and the stakeholders at table had the ability reach agreement. A valuable method used in their project process was that everyone who came to the table at stakeholder meetings had the authority to make on-the-spot agreements. FMP understands that not every project involves partners that can obtain the ability to have an individual make decisions on behalf of their organization at the stakeholder table, but they found in their project being able to do so was valuable to streamlining project progress.
2. Fire Models are invaluable tool to refining proposed actions: Another lesson shared by FMP is that they found the most valuable science used in their project to be the fire modeling. The emphasis on fire models helped evaluate proposed actions and refine to get acceptable fire behavior, thereby justifying the treatment Rx. Fire modeling benefited the NEPA and CEQA processes by demonstrating that the no-action alternative was actually the worst alternative for the forest. FMP found the fire modeling essential and is a lesson that they intend to apply to future projects in their region.

A: Neil Chapman, Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP)

1. Tell the truth: Sometimes people have a hard time saying anything in a meeting. Speak up and tell the truth, no matter how hard it may be.
2. Be open to trusting others: Over time as we build trust across our stakeholder groups, people begin to feel more comfortable saying what they have to say. Everyone in the room has the responsibility to create an environment where people can be open to speak their truth. Assuming good intent and being open to trusting others accelerates the process.
3. Build in flexibility: Sometimes FWPP found that when they put boots on the ground the prescriptions identified did not work. Build in a flexible toolbox approach within NEPA as well as strategies to implement.
4. Identify who will benefit: The City of Flagstaff enacted a tax to fund the forest management because members of the community will benefit from a healthy forest. They are constantly looking into ways to spread the cost across others who benefit from the forest, such as the City of Phoenix.
5. There is nothing wrong with direct capacity support: Not everything needs to be transforming a process. Sometimes organizations do not have the capacity to accomplish all the tasks at hand; reach out, find a need, and fill it.
6. Demonstrate progress early to build momentum.
7. Don't let perfection get in the way of progress.
8. Help people realize that the log truck driving out of the woods isn't the end of the project: Educate the community that we must get back in there and start thinking about how to reintroduce fire right away as it is necessary to maintain the investments.

9. Don't shy away from talking about smoke impacts: Fire is necessary for forest maintenance. Provide tools to help get the public on board because with proper education people can learn to like good fire.

Resources and reference material shared by the panelists from the Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership, the French Meadows Watershed Health Project, and the Flagstaff Watershed Project are available on ESCCRP Stakeholder website.

Given the significance of this panel discussion, we have opted to provide the full panelist video. Further, timestamps from the video clip are provided to help stakeholders find relevant information in the most efficient manner. Video can be found at on the ESCCRP Stakeholder Resources website or at [Panel Discussion: Lessons Learned from Landscape Scale Restoration Projects across the West - YouTube.com](#)

Q: Was there a tipping point for your project where you saw a change in the momentum of the group? If so, what was it and what were the drivers? (0:47:20)

Q: How do you measure project success? (1:00:15)

A huge thank you to the panelists for taking time out of their busy schedules to share their valuable experiences.

4. Q & A

The floor opened to the stakeholder group to ask questions to the panelists. The following questions arose:

Q: In the ESCCRP one of the significant challenges we face is how to deal with biomass. If you do not have a mill nearby your project, what do you do with the biomass material? (1:10:00)

Q: How do you address the public perception of the forest health projects, help them understand the value of the work being done, and create an understanding of the value of returning fire to the landscape? (1:20:25)

Q: Given the sequencing we are in right now with the ESCCRP, what are the most important points in time to start engaging the community? (1:27:48)

5. Project Funding Updates

a. Governor's Early Action Budget for Wildlife

On April 13, 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed a \$536 million wildlife package enabling the state to take urgent action on projects that support wildfire suppression, improve forest health, and build resilience in communities to help protect residents and property from catastrophic wildfires in diverse landscapes across the state. Rough budget allocations are as follows:

- \$155 million allocated to the CAL FIRE Forest Health Program
- \$123 million allocated to CAL FIRE Fire Prevention Grants
- \$50 million allocated to Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program

- \$20 million allocated to SNC for project implementation in high-risk areas

Visit [Adoption of April 2021 Wildfire and Forest Resilience Early Action Package \(ca.gov\)](#) for the full funding breakdown of the 2020-2021 Wildfire and Forest Resilience Early Action Package.

b. CAL FIRE Grant Funding Opportunities

i. California Climate Investments Forest Health Grant Program

CAL FIRE's California Climate Investments Forest Health Grant Program currently has a solicitation open with proposals due May 19, 2021. In early March, CAL FIRE invited the ESCCRP to a special pre-screening for a directed grant program for CAL FIRE's Forest Health Grant. We have submitted a one-page proposal of the USFS NEPA ready units and three non-federally owned parcels within the Town as a direct outcome of the early conversations with the stakeholder group. The proposal included a combination of mechanical, hand, and Rx fire treatments on the approximate 2,000 acres. If awarded, the ESCCRP Phase 1 Implementation, would fund implementation of the approximate 2,000 acres and CEQA planning, with CAL FIRE serving as the CEQA lead agency. One caveat with the CAL FIRE grant opportunity is the CEQA needs to be completed in the first year after the grant is signed. If funded, we will be on a tight timeline to complete CEQA within the first year.

We are expecting to know sometime next week if we will move forward in the directed award grant program. If we are not selected in this initial round, we have been strongly encouraged to apply through the regular Forest Health Grant Program.

Update 4/19/2021: ESCCRP Phase 1 Implementation has been invited to move forward in the Forest Health Direct Award process. The next step is to submit the application by May 19, 2021.

Action Item: Letters of Support or Participation have been requested from the group and a template provided. Letters are due May 7 to kelsey@plumascorporation.org

ii. California Climate Investments Fire Prevention Grant Opportunity

Holly Alpert shared an update on the RFFCP's involvement in the CAL FIRE Fire Prevention Grant opportunity. The RFFCP is working to determine what proposals are most appropriate to include in this funding round. They are preparing a proposal focused on visitor outreach and education around wildfire prevention. Other potential proposals include planning proposals for community wildfire protection plans, planning proposals for fuels reduction work, and potentially a fuels reduction implementation proposal. The RFFCP is still working out the details but is likely to submit one to three proposals on a regional scale.

c. CDFW Prop. 1 NEPA Planning Ask

In February we submitted a grant proposal to the CDFW Proposition 1 Watershed Restoration Grants Program. The goal was to secure funding to build a locally based interdisciplinary team to work with the ESCOG & INF to build long overdue capacity for environmental planning deficits in the Eastern Sierra. If funded, this team will perform the environmental analysis for NEPA on 10,000 priority acres of the ESCCRP as a first task. This team could then serve on future ecosystem health projects for the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program as well as

the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership. This was a highly competitive grant solicitation; awards are anticipated to be announced in June 2021.

d. Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Directed Grant Program

Matt Driscoll, SNC Eastern Sierra Representative, shared an update on the SNC Directed Grant Program for shovel-ready projects. The solicitation was announced the day the Governor signed the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Early Action Package and has a short turnaround. First round submittals are due April 30, 2021, then submittals are ongoing until funds are expended. There is \$20 million available, and it is anticipated that the all of funds will be allotted through first-round submittals. Beyond the initial \$20 million of immediate action funding, SNC is in line for \$50 million for the next fiscal year, depending on budget approval sometime in June or July. The ESCCRP is not applying to this funding opportunity as we are currently amid the CAL FIRE grant application.

6. Boundary Edits Progress

The funding round through CAL FIRE has spurred some additional requests for parcel additions from the Town of Mammoth Lakes and Mammoth Mountain Ski Area. We have already established what we need for the current CAL FIRE Forest Health grant, but these additions would help up maintain multi-jurisdictional scope for future funding rounds and are likely good fits under CAL FIRE's prevention grant program. The additions need to be considered by the group for inclusion in the overarching ESCCRP project but will not be included as a part of the May 19 CAL FIRE grant application.

Action Item: Partners that have parcels that warrant additional consideration for inclusion in the project should send the parcel information to Kelsey along with rationale for inclusion (Fire Department evaluation, CWPP identification, etc.)

7. Review of Goals & Objectives

a. Progress

Comments from the March 11 meeting are in internal review with the USFS, and we are continuing to work to incorporate revisions into the Goals and Objectives document. We aim to get the Goals and Objectives document in final draft form and back to the group prior to the next meeting.

b. Next Steps

Action Item: Keep an eye out for an email with the final draft Goals & Objectives document in the coming weeks

(Impromptu conversation about education & outreach regarding prescribed fire)

The group discussed the challenges associated with getting the community on board with prescribed fire and associated smoke. Chance Traub, USFS, shared a prescribed fire experience around the Deschutes National Forest. A prescribed fire had been ignited right outside around town without much prior public education and outreach. Resultingly, they received about 1,000 phone calls which crashed their EMS dispatching system. Since then, they have a created a successful outreach campaign and program. Now they can perform prescribed fires without receiving phone calls to EMS dispatching. There are plenty of models, examples, and resources from successful efforts, such as what is going on in the Deschutes National Forest, that we can

apply to our region. The group discussed the timing of the ESCCRP smoke campaign, how to utilize our local expertise to educate the public on the matter, and the need to move forward with a consistent message from the group to the public.

A smoke campaign document, shared by Neil from the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project, can be found at [GFFP Smoke Campaign.pdf](#)

8. Meeting Wrap-Up and Next Steps

a. The next meeting tentatively will be on May 27, 2021

The May meeting was originally scheduled for May 13. Janet proposed to the group to push back the meeting date to alleviate some of the strain on the ESCCRP staff and the RFFCP staff as they prepare the CAL FIRE grant applications due on May 19.

During the next meeting, we will begin the needs assessment discussion and work to finalize the Goals & Objectives.

b. Review of Action Items:

- Letters of Support or Participation for the CAL FIRE Forest Health Grant are due to Kelsey by May 7
- Plumas Corp will work with the INF to incorporate edits into Goals and Objectives for the project and is anticipating sending out a final draft to the group prior to the May 27 meeting.
- Plumas Corp and INF will work with the various landowners individually to advance the conversation around the formal inclusion of their lands and the necessary agreements that will be required