

# **Eastern Sierra Climate & Communities Resilience Project**

## **March 11, 2021**

### **Meeting Summary**

#### **1. Fun Fact Five: Understanding Basic Forest Metrics**

#### **2. Welcome & Introductions**

##### **a. New Staff**

- Chance Callahan, Eastern California Water Association, Sierra Corps Forestry Fellow
- Kelsey Glastetter, Plumas Corp., Sierra Corps Forestry Fellow
- Stephen Calkins, Inyo National Forest, North Zone Forester

##### **b. Attendees**

1. Allan Pietrasanta, Sierra Business Council
2. Andrew Mulford, Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access
3. Chance Callahan, Eastern California Water Association
4. David Haas, CAL FIRE
5. Elaine Kabala, ESCOG
6. Erin Noesser, Inyo National Forest
7. Gordon Martin, Inyo National Forest
8. Holly Alpert, Eastern California Water Association
9. Janet Hatfield, Plumas Corp.
10. Jora Fogg, Friends of the Inyo
11. Kelsey Glastetter, Plumas Corp.
12. Ken Brengle, Mammoth Lakes Chamber of Commerce
13. Kim Anaclerio, Mammoth Lakes Recreation
14. Kim Cooke, Town of Mammoth Lakes
15. Lynn Boulton, Sierra Club
16. Malcolm Clark, Sierra Club
17. Malcolm North, UC Davis, USDA Forest Service
18. Marc Meyer, USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station
19. Matt Driscoll, Sierra Nevada Conservancy
20. Natalie Morrow, Mammoth Lakes Fire Department
21. Nathan Sill, Inyo National Forest
22. Rick Kattlemann, Plumas Corp. & Eastern California Water Association
23. Ron Tucker, LADWP
24. Scott Kusumoto, USFS
25. Stephen Calkins, Inyo National Forest
26. Steve Baule, LADWP
27. Taro Pusina, INF FMO
28. Todd Ellsworth, USFS
29. Tom Schaniel, Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District

### 3. January Meeting Synopsis/Agenda Overview

#### a. January 14 Meeting Summary

A brief overview of the January meeting was provided to refresh the memories of the meeting participants. Key components of the January meeting included:

- Project boundary/multi-jurisdictional landowner discussion: reviewed the project boundary and discussed the benefits & challenges associated with a multi-jurisdictional approach
- Project Goals: discussed the draft Goals of the project; action item assigned at Jan 14 meeting to review the draft Goals document and offer suggested revision changes – no comments outside the USFS were received

#### b. Today's Agenda Overview

- ESCCRP Progress Report
- Goals & Objectives- continued
- Multi-Jurisdictional Landowner Inclusion Discussion- continued

### 4. ESCCRP Progress Report

#### a. CDFW Grant Application

The Eastern Sierra Pace & Scale Accelerator (The Accelerator) application was submitted to the Feb 19 CDFW Proposition 1 Watershed Restoration Grant Program addressing the program priority: manage headwaters for multiple benefits. The Accelerator proposed funding a private locally based Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) to perform the environmental analysis for the ESCCRP and a future suite of projects under the Eastern Sierra Council of Government's (ESCOG) Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program. Additionally, The Accelerator proposed planning funds to support NEPA across the total ESCCRP project area and surveys for 10,000 priority acres.

The application was a calculated risk, proposing a unique approach to address much needed environmental planning capacity deficits in the eastern Sierra. We had consensus from the grants team, the USFS, and ESCOG that using the current model we will not be able to meet future demands for increases in planned work and this proposal aims to provide an initial remedy to the current problem.

The 2021 CDFW Prop 1 Grant Program was an **extremely competitive** round. CDFW received a total of 128 proposals seeking a combined ask of \$178 million. Outside of the Delta, there was approximately \$33 million available which is an indicator of the competitive nature of this solicitation.

The Accelerator demonstrated the need for action, provided a comprehensive project scope, and emphasized regional support of many partners. (A big thank you to all who provided letters of support for this project.) The Accelerator is not guaranteed success in securing funding from this solicitation, but we are hopeful as we wait for the grant award notifications which are expected in June 2021.

**b. CAL FIRE Forest Health Opportunity**

CAL FIRE opened the 2021 Forest Health grant solicitation this month with a deadline of May 19, 2021. CAL FIRE reached out to inquire if the ESCCRP has NEPA ready acres that are available to move forward in implementation; the Forest Service and Janet Hatfield are working to identify which acres might be the best fit for this solicitation. We will have a more detailed update at the April 15 meeting.

**5. Goals & Objectives**

**a. Breakout Group Objective Development**

Participants were separated into five Zoom breakout groups to review, revise, and refine the draft Goals and Objectives document. When addressing the objectives, the group was asked to keep SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound) objectives in mind, emphasizing “realistic” and “attainable”.

**b. Group Objective Review**

After reconvening, the breakout room facilitators each summarized their group’s discussion. Overarching themes that arose from the various groups included:

- Need to clearly distinguish between goals and objectives
- Need for refinement of both goals and objectives to be more concise and meet the “SMART” definition
- Rearrangement of objectives so that they follow a sequential timeline
- Need for clarity of fire’s role in this project
- Concern that perhaps some resources were represented disproportionately over others- aim for equity
- Acreage targets were questioned as “achievable” by several groups given the complexities of some of the acres

After each group’s facilitator summarized their Group’s discussion, the floor opened to additional comments and questions:

A question was raised as to the emphasis seen on recreation among the goals and objectives. A discussion ensued about the relationship between ecosystem health and sustainable recreation, noting the intrinsic link between the two. It is recognized by the Group that sustainable recreation is the foundation of the health of the local economy and is absolutely dependent on the health of the ecosystems surrounding our communities. As such, it was suggested to include “ecosystem health” in current goal #1 to ensure it is appropriately recognized.

There was concern voiced about fire as a restoration tool. The USFS reminded the Group that they need to implement the project in a consistent manner with the Land Management Plan, which recognizes the role of fire in achieving ecosystem health. Some concern was voiced about recreation in burned or “blackened” areas stating that it might be ‘undesirable’. The Group was reminded that by living in this area we have elected to live in a fire-dependent ecosystem, where fire is an inevitable part of the landscape. We can, however, choose what type of fire we experience by implementing science driven fuels reduction that returns our forests back to within their historic

densities also known as “natural range of variation”. This effort affords us the opportunity to turn destructive wildfire into a more beneficial “mildfire”. It is recognized it will take a significant education program to change public perception and understanding of the need for fire to support not only a healthy ecosystem but a sustainable local recreation economy.

## **6. Multi-Jurisdictional Landowner Inclusion Discussion**

Janet Hatfield summarized the potential lands for inclusion as discussed in January: TOML parcels along Mammoth Creek, Camp High Sierra, Valentine Reserve, LADWP, and The Parcel. When discussing the additions to the project, Janet asks the group to consider for each proposed addition how the additions help us meet the project Goals & Objectives.

The ESCCRP web map was displayed for the group with each potential addition for inclusion and can be found at:

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=6fe5cf774573439496af69164ef7eb8a>

Several of the landowners/lessees were not in attendance so much of the conversation was limited to consideration of the parcels owned by the Town of Mammoth Lakes.

The Town-owned parcels are open space designated parcels in the Old Mammoth neighborhoods. They were discussed as high risk/high wildfire danger due to the lack of infrastructure including substandard roads and a lack of fire hydrants in that part of town. If the current goal that addresses helping the Town of Mammoth Lakes become a fire and smoke adapted community remains a goal of the project, these proposed parcel additions are a reasonable piece of the project to consider. By reducing the problem areas presented, it will relieve emergency services personnel from being spread too thin when the next wildfire arrives. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan examines the wildfire hazard, vulnerabilities, and means of reducing risk for the County and Town. The CWPP recognizes the Old Mammoth area to have higher hazard exposure to the Community and is ranked as an extreme wildfire hazard area.

The MLFD supports including these parcels and further states they would like to focus on creating a defensible perimeter or “moat” around the Town. MLFD cites high tree mortality, prevailing winds, and sub-standard roads and current hydrant infrastructure as major reasons to prioritize these parcels. MLFD has been working on trying to perform fuels reduction at Camp High Sierra last summer utilizing the CCC but due to contract issues we not able to do the work.

The Valentine Reserve, another “very high” risk area, has already accomplished fuels reduction work and their interest in the project lies in the long-term maintenance. The Inyo National Forest and Valentine Reserve need to focus future conversations on how the reserve lands can be integrated with the Inyo’s future long-term forest maintenance planning.

The LADWP owned land located near the eastern portion of the project area, that is not currently included in the project boundary, was discussed. The area includes approximately 120 acres of timber within about a 1,200-acre segment west of Hwy 395. The land would benefit from fuels work as fire does not adhere to man-made land ownership boundaries. LADWP needs more information on the land management desires and clarity on what specific parcels of their land are being proposed from the Inyo NF. This area does fall in within the CAL FIRE treatable landscape programmatic EIR so that could be used as a tool for environmental analyses, but proposed

treatments need to be identified as a first step before understanding in the CalVTP is an appropriate tool or if more streamlined CEQA pathways are available.

We are seeking alignment from the Group needs before moving forward with parcel additions. Fire management personnel emphasize the need to perform as much pro-active fuels work as possible to ensure the future resilience of the Community from wildfire. The Group is also reminded that including these parcels would benefit the project when applying to grants, such as CAL FIRE and Sierra Nevada Conservancy who are emphasizing a multi-jurisdictional approach.

**Action Item: Plumas Corp and the INF will continue to work with each entity to learn what they will need in place to move forward with fuels mitigation planning. Once proposed actions for each area are identified, the appropriate CEQA pathways can be identified.**

**a. CEQA Exemptions Options**

There are a few exemptions out there, some look like a good fit for the Camp High Sierra parcel but are questionable for the Town-owned parcels given they are not developed and are along a riparian corridor.

**b. CalVTP utility, realities**

LADWP land is part of the treatable landscapes within the SRA. The California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) is a brand new tool; there are not many projects utilizing the CalVTP to help guide the process. There are a few RCDs in northern California using this programmatic EIR and have shared valuable information on what the initial investment looks like. Once we understand the desired actions and have clarity for the parcel additions, we can further investigate whether the CalVTP is appropriate.

**c. How do differing CEQA needs interact**

The last piece is understanding how the different CEQA analyses interact. It is possible to utilize a variety of CEQA tools within a given project, other projects are doing it, but we need to figure out the mechanics of how it all works.

**d. CEQA Lead Agency**

An issue we face in the Eastern Sierra is the lack of a local entity that can legally serve as a CEQA lead agency for vegetation management work. CEQA will be required on all lands, Federal and Non-Federal if we want to be eligible for State grant funds. Due to the inability to secure an entity to serve as the CEQA lead agency we had to drop the CEQA planning task from the CDFW proposal for the ESCCRP. We need to solve how we are going to address the CEQA lead agency problem into the future. When applying to grants through entities such as CAL FIRE and Sierra Nevada Conservancy, they hold the legal ability to serve as the CEQA lead agency but most of the leg work falls on the grantee or a subcontractor. In other areas across the Sierra RCD's serve in this role, filling a critical gap in the region's ability to get work done on the ground. This is not the last time this issue will come up, so it is an issue we are going to need to address if we expect to meet future demands in pace and scale needs for vegetation management work.

**e. Necessary agreements**

This segment was not discussed.

## **7. Close Out**

### **a. The next meeting will be on April 15, 2021**

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

### **b. Review of Action Items:**

- Plumas Corp will work with the INF to incorporate edits into Goals and Objectives for the project
- Plumas Corp and INF will work with the various landowners individually to advance the conversation around formal inclusion of their lands and the necessary agreements that will be required