

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

## **January 13, 2022**

### **Meeting Summary**

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

##### **a. Attendees**

- Allan Pietrasanta, Sierra Business Council
- Betty Hylton, Mammoth Community Water District
- Bob Gardner, Mono County
- Carol Blanchette, Valentine Eastern Sierra Reserves
- David Page, Winter Wildlands Alliance
- Elaine Kabala, Eastern Sierra Council of Governments
- Holly Alpert, Eastern California Water Association
- Janet Hatfield, Plumas Corp.
- Jason Smith, TSS Consultants
- Jason Wingard, Inyo National Forest
- Jay Varney, Madera County
- Jora Fogg, Friends of the Inyo
- Kelsey Glastetter, Plumas Corp.
- Kim Cooke, Town of Mammoth Lakes
- Lynn Boulton, Sierra Club
- Malcolm Clark, Sierra Club
- Marc Meyer, USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station
- Mark Snowiss, Environmental Outreach Strategies Consulting
- Michael Wiese, Inyo National Forest
- Monica Buhler, Devils Postpile National Monument
- Nathan Sill, Inyo National Forest
- Paul Lackovic, Spatial Informatics Group
- Rebecca Carr Wong, Devils Postpile National Monument
- Rick Kattelmann, Plumas Corp. & Eastern California Water Association
- Stacy Coreless, Mono County
- Stephen Calkins, Inyo National Forest
- Steve Baule, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Taro Pusina, Spatial Informatics Group
- Todd Ellsworth, Inyo National Forest
- Tom Hodges, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area
- Tom Schaniel, Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District

#### **2. Group Updates**

##### **a. CAL FIRE Forest Health Grant**

After some administrative challenges that postponed the execution of the grant agreement for several months, the CAL FIRE grant agreement was executed on December 21, 2021. This is great news as we were able to take advantage of the State of CA CEQA exemption (SB901)

for NEPA-ready federal acres, ensuring that the project can remain on schedule. The next steps are to begin to get all the sub-contracts in place. An RFP for the 2022 implementation work in Reds Meadow was circulated and closed on November 19. We received bids from 4 contractors. ESCCRP and INF staff are reviewing the bids and anticipate awarding the contract by the end of January.

**b. CDFW Prop. 1 Restoration Grant**

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) executed the grant agreement for *The Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator* on October 13, 2021. The ESCOG will contract out all services to complete NEPA compliance for the ESCCRP and prepare the project for implementation, while building local capacity to do this kind of work in the future. In November, the ESCOG circulated an RFP for Project Management and Project Implementation Preparation Services. In December, the ESCOG awarded the project management contract to the Whitebark Institute. This contract will develop a sustainable funding plan, workforce development, outreach & education, and CEQA planning for the project area. The ESCOG is currently drafting another RFP specific to environmental planning. This contract will accomplish the NEPA planning for the entire project area and 10,000 acres of surveys on priority areas. The RFP for Environmental Planning Services is expected to be circulated in February and remain open for 30 days.

**c. Upcoming Funding Opportunities**

The California Governor's Budget includes [\\$1.2 Billion for Wildfire & Forest Resilience](#) in the next two years. These funds are in addition to the early action funding that came out last year. Combined, there is a total investment of \$2.7 billion focused on the wildfire issues in California over the upcoming three years. There is a tremendous number of financial resources currently available to support this work, and there are a couple of solicitations open now.

Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) has a solicitation open through January 31 as a part of their [Wildfire Recovery and Forest Resilience Directed Grant Program](#). This program cycle has \$25 million available funded through the General Fund in the Wildfire and Forest Resilience package of the 2021 Budget. SNC is expecting another funding round to open in Summer 2022.

CAL FIRE has multiple grant funding opportunities currently open. The [CCI Forest Health Grant Program](#) has a solicitation open through March 4 with \$120 million available. The [Fire Prevention Grant Program](#) has a solicitation open now through February 9 with \$120 million also available. The [Wood Products and Bioenergy Program](#) has a Business and Workforce Development solicitation currently open. It will be accepting applications continuously as funding availability allows, with \$24 million available.

The ESCCRP project team is not planning to submit to these funding rounds at present as we need to hire staff and build capacity before we can take on additional grants. INF also currently lacks the capacity to take on large grants such as the CCI grants but is looking to pursue funding through the SNC Summer 2022 funding round. This year, INF hopes to ramp up its staff to be better positioned to apply to CCI grants next year.

### 3. Needs Assessment Ad Hoc Team Presentations

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

#### a. Finance & Marketing

The Finance & Marketing Ad Hoc Focal Team aims to identify key beneficiaries of the project to guide sustainable fundraising for the ESCCRP through innovative financial mechanisms and collaborative fundraising. The plan's goal is to recognize the real costs of catastrophic wildfire and work to avoid such costs through pro-active forest restoration using innovative and collaborative financial approaches. Analysis of the literature suggests that nearly half of the full community costs of wildfires are paid at the local community level by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and homeowners. A study by Headwaters Economics assesses the [Full Community Costs of Wildfire](#) and was touched on briefly in the presentation with a link provided to the Group for those interested in learning more.

The Finance & Marketing workplan lays the framework to develop a sustainable funding plan. The first task identified in the plan is to select a member from each key project beneficiary to serve on a Financial Advisory Team to help solve for the many financial challenges of the project. Other early tasks recognize the need to develop an accurate cost estimate of project implementation to determine overall fundraising goals. The plan identifies the need to work individually with each beneficiary to identify meaningful metrics from which to quantify benefits. Multiple beneficiaries may have interest in units that overlap, so one task highlights the need to identify acres of priority for each beneficiary. The next series of tasks articulates the need to build an appropriate entity to oversee and manage funds raised for the ESCCP, pursue State Block Grant funding with local and state agency partners, seek out innovative financial mechanisms, track new and upcoming legislation, and develop an Action Plan for the ESCCRP. The Lake Tahoe Basin has a [Forest Action Plan](#) that can serve as a valuable reference document for developing the ESCCRP Action Plan.

No comments were provided from the stakeholder group on the Finance & Marketing workplan.

#### b. Project Prioritization

The prioritization for the ESCCRP expresses a tiered approach. Workplans were developed for Tiers 1 & 2 as a part of the ESCCRP Needs Assessment, with Tier 3 being lead by the USFS as described below.

##### i. Tier 1: Built Environment

Built Environment: Spatial Informatics Group (SIG) developed a workplan to address the prioritization of the built environment. The workplan outlines the convening of a team of ESCCRP partners to help provide local insight into community priorities. The plan identifies high-value assets and resources (HVAR) in the built environment, including structures, utilities/infrastructure, and ingress/egress routes. The plan

recognizes the need to determine appropriate treatments to reduce the rate of spread and intensity of fire surrounding the various HVAR. Once assets are well understood, fire behavior modeling will be used to simulate fire on the landscape. The goal is to use fire behavior modeling overlaid with HVAR data to target areas for treatment to reduce the rate of spread and the flame length of fire in the areas.

A question was posed to SIG regarding the outputs of the fire modeling and if the fire modeling provides information on types of treatment needed for each of the HVAR in the community wildfire protection zones. SIG responded and described how the fire modeling has various inputs that can be modified within the modeling extent, including wind speed, aspect, fuel loading, etc. The outputs from the analysis can show the projections of what would happen if fire moved through the landscape at present and how the predictions might change with various treatments. The fire modeling can be used to help inform the prescription necessary to reduce adverse fire effects near HVAR.

**ii. Tier 2: Local Priorities**

The Ad Hoc Focal Teams working on Tier 2: Local Priorities not only drafted the workplans, but completed the work for both Tier 2 efforts.

Recreation: The purpose of the recreation prioritization workplan is twofold; 1) understand the vulnerability of recreation assets/infrastructure and 2) document recreation concerns associated with the implementation of ecological forest restoration. The Ad Hoc Focal Team consisted of members from various recreation-centric organizations in the region. Collaboratively, the Team identified key concerns associated with forest restoration implementation and opportunities to improve certain recreation assets through the ESCCRP. Additionally, the Team identified recreation improvements that could be headed by local recreation organizations and could utilize the synergy of the ESCCRP.

The goals of the workplan are to protect existing recreation infrastructure, ensure proper restoration of recreation assets post-treatment, and minimize the impacts to recreational users through the implementation process. Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access (MLTPA) has an existing database of recreation assets in the project area. The Team assigned two rankings for each asset; 1) susceptibility to inadvertent human ignitions from recreation users and 2) the impact to recreation infrastructure in the event of wildfire. Combined, these rankings provide information on which recreation assets are most vulnerable to fire. The rankings were incorporated into the geodatabase of recreation assets and can be utilized to help inform the prioritization of areas for treatment.

A comment from Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) described the need for additional recreation considerations when working in their permit area beyond general recreation considerations. These additional considerations are not included in the recreation workplan but will be discussed further with MMSA when the timing is appropriate.

Wildlife: The purpose of the Wildlife workplan is to identify priority areas in which we can improve wildfire habitat within the ESCCRP planning area and outside of existing NEPA-ready units. USFS and CDFW personnel compiled data on wildlife species of importance and specialized habitats within the ESCCRP to help inform the prioritization of ecological forest restoration actions in a timely manner with input from local experts.

The Team identified at-risk species, species of conservation concern, and habitat of concern within the project area. The habitat and monitoring zones of the identified species were overlaid with [Fire Return Interval Data \(FRID\)](#) to understand the departure from desired vegetation conditions. The Team identified approximately 4,000 acres of priority wildlife habitat for treatment by performing this task.

A comment from an INF ecologist on the Team added a disclaimer that while compiling this data, there was a realization that some of the datasets were imperfect. Field surveys and tweaking of the data layers will help refine that data in the future.

**iii. Tier 3: Ecosystems**

ACCEL is a Forest Service Region 5 project currently under development to jumpstart the Forest's ability to conduct and contribute to large-scale restoration planning to speed implementation. ACCEL is a remote sensing program to assess relevant resource conditions. The resultant product from this effort is expected to be available by the end of 2022. Tier 2: Local Priorities were developed because the ACCEL program is currently unavailable and there was a need for more timely prioritization of high priority areas given we have funding from CDFW to begin surveys on the first 10,000 priority acres of the project in summer 2022. In addition, our Tier 1 & 2 efforts can serve as a ground-truthing tool to understand the accuracy and limitations that may be associated with ACCEL.

**4. Meeting Wrap-Up and Next Steps**

**a. February 10**

- Proposed Actions
- INF Climate Change Trend Presentation

**b. March 10**

- 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. We hope to discuss this more with our Stakeholders at either the Feb or March meetings.