

Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program - East Subregion

Capacity Assessment



Eastern California Water Association

Sierra Corps

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List of Acronyms

CCC:	California Conservation Corps
CEQA:	California Environmental Quality Act
CHIPS:	Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions
CWPP:	Community Wildfire Protection Plan
ECWA:	Eastern California Water Association
ESCCRP:	Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resilience Project
ESCOG:	Eastern California Council of Government
ESSRP:	Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Program
FSC:	Fire Safe Council
INF:	Inyo National Forest
IRWMP:	Integrated Regional Water Management Program
LADWP:	Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
MJHMP:	Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
NEPA:	National Environmental Policy Act
OES:	Office of Emergency Services
RFFCP:	Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program
RPAC:	Regional Planning Advisory Committee (Mono County)
SNC:	Sierra Nevada Conservancy
WUI:	Wildland Urban Interface

Introduction

The *Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program: Initial Capacity Assessment on Forest Health and Fire Risk Reduction* (SNC, 2020) noted that the eastern region (Alpine, Mono, and Inyo counties) “has the least amount of collaborative activity and organizational capacity. Resources are needed at a basic level to promote collaboration and partnership development and to build capacity to design, fund, and implement projects. Many tribal organizations in this geography have a difficult time engaging with planning processes and public land management efforts.” It was with this evaluation that the East subregion Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP) team began its work in January 2020. The results of the initial assessment process detailed in this report demonstrate that while there are capacity and funding needs, there is also much strength and resilience in local organizations and their partnerships with other entities.

Our first step was to develop a list of stakeholders interested in ecosystem health and fire resilience issues with whom we wanted to conduct interviews. This list grew as we learned about more stakeholders in the region. Through other efforts such as the Integrated Regional Water Management Program (IRWMP), as well as personal knowledge, we already had a substantial network from which to contact people. Then, once we started conducting interviews, interviewees were able to help us make contact with stakeholders we did not already know.



As of the writing of this report, we interviewed 47 people representing 31 agencies and organizations through 28 interviews. Stakeholders came from all three counties in the East subregion and represented all types of organizations, including federal, state, and local agencies; fire safe councils; small non-profits; Tribes; and water suppliers. Interviewees were both paid staff members and volunteers. All gave generously of their time and knowledge.

Up until mid-March 2020, all interviews were conducted in person unless the interviewee was not physically located in the region (such as a couple of second homeowners and California Fire Safe Council). During the week of March 16, 2020, California began shutting down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our last in-person interview was conducted March 20, 2020. While initially we thought we might be able to wait it out and conduct the rest of our interviews in person before the deadline for this assessment, it quickly became apparent that we would all be staying separate for a while. Thus, we created a Zoom account and started

asking stakeholders if they would be willing to meet with us virtually. Fortunately, most stakeholders were very obliging, and we conducted eight interviews this way. However, the stay-at-home order did prevent us from completing a small handful of interviews, and we intend to continue conducting some interviews after this assessment report is submitted.

Capacity Building

Organizations and Capacity

The following organizations were interviewed as a part of this capacity assessment exercise:

Alpine County

- Alpine Biomass Collective
- Alpine Fire Safe Council
- Alpine Watershed Group
- Washoe Tribe

Mono County

- Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (Bridgeport and Carson Ranger Districts)
- Inyo National Forest – Mammoth Ranger District
- June Lake Fire Safe Council
- Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District
- Mammoth Lakes Fire Safe Council
- Mono Basin Fire Safe Council
- Mono Basin Historical Society
- Mono County (Supervisor Stacy Corless)
- Mono County (Supervisor Bob Gardner)
- Plumas Corporation
- Swauger Creek
- Twin Lakes Fire Safe Council
- Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council

Inyo County

- Big Pine Paiute Tribe
- Big Pine Volunteer Fire Department
- Bishop Fire Department
- Bishop Paiute Tribe
- Fort Independence Tribe
- Friends of the Inyo
- Inyo County

Regionwide

- Bureau Land Management – Bishop Field Office
- CAL FIRE
- California Fire Safe Council
- California Trout
- Inyo National Forest – Supervisors Office
- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Sierra Institute

Capacity Assessment

The great strength of virtually all the organizations we interviewed, from small community fire safe councils to Tribes to large federal land management agencies, is the commitment and dedication of community members and employees. Because the Eastern Sierra region is isolated from other parts of California in many ways, organizations are accustomed to building

partnerships and finding resources locally. The other side of this coin, of course, is that given the small population, community members wear many hats, often volunteer their time, and are subject to burnout.

A surprising finding was the large amount of capacity in the smaller organizations, particularly volunteer-run organizations such as the fire safe councils, to take on tasks like grant writing, project planning, and grant administration. That being said, most of these organizations also cited these tasks as areas of need and opportunity to build more capacity. The non-profits and local, state, and federal agencies have more capacity in this respect as they have paid staff to fill these roles. These organizations, however, have their own challenges around staffing and funding, largely as a result of the rural and remote nature of the region.

A particular challenge of fire safe councils in the region is that they are all run by volunteers, and the success of the organization lives and dies by the willingness of community members to contribute their time, and in some cases money, to the work of the fire safe council. We heard multiple times that when a particular active volunteer leaves the fire safe council (or community altogether), the work of the organization falters until someone else is willing to take on the mantle of the group. Thus, succession planning is extremely important, and those fire safe councils that have been able to maintain consistency in active volunteers seem to be more successful in their continuity of work and projects.

Because of the variety of organizations and agencies working on issues of fire and ecosystem health in the Eastern Sierra, it is ***difficult to generalize overall as to whether capacity is sufficient***. In all cases, there is opportunity to increase capacity. Different organizations need different kinds of capacity. Some needs can be addressed at the local or regional level (addressed in this section); others require changes to state or federal policy (addressed in Recommendations section). The desired end result is that agencies, organizations, and communities in the Eastern Sierra are able to adequately focus on and fulfill their needs, whether they do it alone or in partnership with others. Such an outcome will also result in safer communities and more naturally-functioning ecosystems.

Capacity-building assistance could take a number of formats in the East subregion.

The ability to provide one-on-one assistance on an ongoing basis would be helpful. Tasks that are addressed through such assistance might include organizational development, finding appropriate grants, grant administration, or project planning. In addition, group trainings covering specific topics are needed.



We are fortunate to be working with American Forests (AF) and Great Basin Institute (GBI). It is anticipated that these two organizations will be able to provide capacity building assistance and technical assistance. The East subregion RFFCP team will also be a capacity building assistance provider.

The table below presents planned capacity building activities as they have been identified so far. It is expected that further capacity building needs will be uncovered as we continue through the assessment and planning processes and that the number of activities will be expanded.

Capacity Building Plan

Program or Assistance	Recipient(s)	Assistance Provider(s)	Timeline	Estimated Cost
List of contractors	All	ECWA/Sierra Corps, GBI, AF	Ongoing, with final product by Dec. 2021	Part of RFFCP grant
Organizational development	Primarily fire safe councils	ECWA/Sierra Corps, CA Fire Safe Council	As needed, by Dec. 2021	Part of RFFCP grant
Grant-finding training	Any interested & relevant stakeholder	SNC and AF	April 2021	SNC would cover, AF is contracted
Grant writing training	Any interested & relevant stakeholder	ECWA, SNC	January 2021	Part of RFFCP grant
Introduction to CAL FIRE grants	Any interested & relevant stakeholder	CAL FIRE	December 2020 – March 2021	CAL FIRE would cover
Meeting facilitation training	Any interested & relevant stakeholder	American Forests	April 2021	Contracted through RFFCP grant
Working towards centralized staffing	Fire safe councils, local agencies	ECWA/SierraCorps with help from FSCs & local agencies, AF, SNC	Ongoing	Unknown
Developing stakeholder network	All relevant & interested stakeholders	ECWA/SierraCorps	Ongoing through Dec. 2021	Part of RFFCP grant
CEQA/NEPA workshops	All relevant & interested stakeholders	AF with help from GBI, SNC	June 2021	AF and GBI are contracted, SNC would cover

Planning

Overview of past planning processes

We thought it would be useful to document the planning processes in the region over the past two decades, rather than only the most recent five years. Many of the older plans in this list are still active and in need of updating.

The limits of planning are well illustrated by the first Mono County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). A collaborative process with the usual stakeholders began in 2005, and the CWPP document was finalized in 2009. The consultant and team produced a sound document that would still seem appropriate today. However, there appears to have been very little action on the plan and its recommendations in the decade since it was written. For example, one of the “very high priority” recommendations was to create a position for a “countywide wildfire coordinator”. That need remains unfulfilled and was independently identified throughout our recent interviews.

Each known (and relevant) plan is described very briefly below using the topics suggested in the assessment report guidelines. Plans are roughly organized by level of jurisdiction (county, local, federal, etc.) with headings for each.

County Plans

Name of Process	Alpine County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
Timeline	2015-2018
Convenor	Alpine County
Entities involved	Alpine County, RO Anderson Engineering, Inc. (consulting firm that prepared plan), Alpine County School District, Bear Valley Water District, California Office of Emergency Services, Carson Water Subconservancy District, Eastern Alpine Fire & Rescue, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Kirkwood Meadows Public Utility District, Lake Alpine Water Company, Markleeville Water Company, Markleeville Public Utility District, NOAA-National Weather Service, South Tahoe Public Utility District, Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California
Geographic area	Alpine County
Strengths	Appropriate perspective of hazards relative to small population at risk; important reminder of indirect impacts of fire; sections on capability assessment and plan maintenance were instructive; Table 9.1 – Previous Plan Action Review and Evaluation was a great idea, although one might question the “complete” status of some actions.
Weaknesses	Vulnerability analysis seemed too brief
Online source	http://alpinecountyca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2372

Name of Process	Inyo County / City of Bishop Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
Timeline	Completed in 2017
Convenor	Inyo County and City of Bishop
Entities involved	Inyo County, City of Bishop, Aaron Pfannenstiel (consultant that prepared much of the plan), California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection,

	California Department of Transportation, California Highway Patrol, California Office of Emergency Services, Cerro Coso Community College, Death Valley National Park, Eastern Sierra Transit Authority, Inyo National Forest, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Manzanar National Historic Site, Northern Inyo Hospital, Sierra Highlands Community Services District, SuddenLink, Sierra Tactical Training and Active Response Resources, US Geological Survey
Geographic area	Inyo County
Strengths	Overview of all hazards; comprehensive; not surprisingly, wildfire was ranked as the highest priority
Weaknesses	Given the priority of wildfire, the associated mitigation actions for fire could have given emphasis or greater visibility
Online source	https://www.inyocounty.us/sites/default/files/2019-07/12292017_InyoCountyMJHMP_FEMA_wAppendices.pdf

Name of Process	Inyo County Emergency Operations Plan
Timeline	Last updated in 2016
Convenor	Inyo County
Entities involved	Inyo County and an extensive list of emergency responders
Geographic area	Inyo County
Strengths	Seemingly well-designed clear emergency response plan
Weaknesses	No obvious deficiencies
Online source	https://www.inyocounty.us/sites/default/files/2019-07/INYO%20COUNTY%202016%20EOP-FINAL.pdf

Name of Process	Mono County and Town of Mammoth Lakes Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
Timeline	2017-2019 (updated MJHMP of 2006)
Convenor	Mono County and Town of Mammoth Lakes
Entities involved	Mono County, Town of Mammoth Lakes, Michael Baker International (consulting firm that prepared plan), Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District, Antelope Valley Fire District, Inyo National Forest, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Regional Emergency Medical Services Authority Care Flight, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Fire Department and Police Department, Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council, Antelope Valley Community Emergency Response Team, Mammoth Community Water District, California Department of Transportation District 9, California Highway Patrol, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, Pine Glade Association, Inc., Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and Southern California Edison
Geographic area	Mono County
Strengths	Overview of all hazards; comprehensive; dual treatment of county and town was quite well done, despite expecting it to be awkward;
Weaknesses	Separation of wildfire hazard into CWPP (Chapter 7) only weakened the multi-hazard context and perspective of the overall plan, although wildfire is

	incorporated in the Plan Hazard Measures (Table 5.1); maintenance section not as good as in Alpine County's plan
Online source	https://monocounty.ca.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_division/page/9617/mono_county_mjhmp_final_052919_w-appdx.pdf

Name of Process	Alpine County Community Wildfire Protection Plan
Timeline	2017-2018
Convenor	Alpine Fire Safe Council
Entities involved	Alpine Fire Safe Council, Alpine County, Alpine Watershed Group, Eastern Alpine Fire/Rescue, Alpine County Disaster Council, Woodfords Community, homeowner associations, Bear Valley, Kirkwood, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, CAL FIRE, California State Parks, South Tahoe Public Utilities District, California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, Liberty Utilities, Pacific Gas and Electric Company
Geographic area	Alpine County
Strengths	Organization of action items and projects by responsible party and by topic throughout plan, inclusion of home hardening info from Calaveras County CWPP as appendix 7
Weaknesses	A few minor structural inconsistencies in the document
Online source	https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12KJhwZWmHaZ-ma5K2qsYT5NLqg8JWwCn via http://www.alpinefiresafecouncil.org/

Name of Process	Inyo County Community Wildfire Protection Plan
Timeline	2005-2009
Convenor	Inyo County
Entities involved	Inyo County, Anchor Point (consulting firm that prepared plan), City of Bishop, Bishop Fire Dept., Mammoth Lakes Fire Dept., Eastern Sierra Region Fire Safe Council, South Fork Bishop Creek Fire Safe Council, Inyo National Forest, Bureau of Land Management
Geographic area	Inyo County
Strengths	"Recommended solutions" section (more than half of the plan) is well done and well organized; the "neighborhood ignitability analysis and recommendations" section (appendix B) also appears to be well considered
Weaknesses	Needs to be updated
Online source	https://www.inyocounty.us/sites/default/files/2019-07/Inyo%20County%20CWPP%20with%20Appendices.pdf

Name of Process	Mono County Community Wildfire Protection Plan
Timeline	2017-2019 (previous plan in 2009)
Convenor	Mono County and Town of Mammoth Lakes
Entities involved	Mono County, Town of Mammoth Lakes, Michael Baker International (consulting firm that prepared plan), Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District, Inyo National Forest, California Dept. of Forestry and Fire

	Protection, Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council, [other partners not named, but may include most, if not all, participating in MJHMP effort]
Geographic area	Mono County and Town of Mammoth Lakes
Strengths	Description of recent fuels modification projects
Weaknesses	Although not explicitly stated, the 2019 CWPP must be read along with the 2009 CWPP to be an adequate plan; the Plan Hazard Measures (Table 5.1) of the MJHMP should have been repeated within the CWPP (otherwise the recommendations of the CWPP alone are rather weak); appendix 6 (Mono County CWPP Collaborative Effort) is identical with Appendix F of the 2009 CWPP with no attempt at updating – calls into question how much other material was not updated
Online source	Chapter 7 within https://monocounty.ca.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_division/page/9617/mono_county_mjhmp_final_052919_w-appdx.pdf

Local Plans

Name of Process	Mammoth Lakes Community Wildfire Protection Plan Update
Timeline	Completed in 2019
Convenor	Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District
Entities involved	Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District, Inyo National Forest, Town of Mammoth Lakes, Mammoth Lakes Fire Safe Council, Anchor Point Wildland Fire Solutions
Geographic area	Town of Mammoth Lakes
Strengths	Done in response to Mammoth Lakes CPAW of 2018; more detailed study of the Town of Mammoth Lakes than was done for the 2009 Mono County CWPP
Weaknesses	Hazard zones seem like a good start, but will need more spatial detail in next iteration of CWPP; more local knowledge could have been employed, e.g., a news story found on the internet about the Mammoth Lakes Fire Safe Council was used instead of speaking to a representative of the FSC
Online source	http://mammothlakesfd.homestead.com/~local/~Preview/Mammoth_Lakes_CWPP_Update_DRAFT_2019.pdf

Name of Process	Wheeler Crest Community Wildfire Protection Plan
Timeline	2017-2019
Convenor	Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council
Entities involved	Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council, Wheeler Crest Fire Dept., Paradise Fire Dept., Mono County, Inyo National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, CAL FIRE, Eastern Sierra Land Trust, California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Wildland Rx, Inc., and Deer Creek Resources
Geographic area	Swall Meadows and Paradise (Mono County)
Strengths	Widely regarded as a model CWPP, solid lists of recommended projects for each community

Weaknesses	Inadequately funded effort, community members had to perform some of the work of the consultants
Online source	https://drive.google.com/file/d/14FyD3e0wkUIkK-ngzJMh1PZYawDhmX1/view Also Appendix I within https://monocounty.ca.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_division/page/9617/mono_county_mihmp_final_052919_w-appdx.pdf

Name of Process	Wheeler Crest Wildfire Hazard Assessment
Timeline	2017-2019
Convenor	Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council
Entities involved	Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council, Deer Creek Resources, Swall Meadows and Paradise residents
Geographic area	Swall Meadows (Mono County)
Strengths	Parcel-specific fire hazard risk from surveys of fuel loading, defensible space, and home construction
Weaknesses	Impression that the assessment was rushed; for example, parcels with conservation easements are discussed, but Dept. of Fish and Wildlife parcels are not mentioned
Online source	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xjh0mL96CfWcB9J21I57-ZURvPKQTz0R/view

Name of Process	Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire – Final Recommendations for the Town of Mammoth Lakes, CA
Timeline	Completed in 2018
Convenor	Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District
Entities involved	Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District, Inyo National Forest, Town of Mammoth Lakes, Mammoth Lakes Fire Safe Council, Mono County, Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire program, Wildfire Planning International, Wildfire Professional Solutions, and PlaceWorks
Geographic area	Town of Mammoth Lakes
Strengths	Solid planning perspective and recommendations
Weaknesses	Somewhat generic (using much material from CPAW efforts in other communities)
Online source	https://www.townofmammothlakes.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8843/Final-Recommendations-for-the-Town-of-Mammoth-Lakes-CA

Federal Plans

Name of Process	Bishop Resource Management Plan
Timeline	1993
Convenor	Bureau of Land Management
Entities involved	Bureau of Land Management
Geographic area	Mono County and Owens Valley portion of Inyo County

Strengths	Overall management direction and policies for Bishop Resource Area of BLM
Weaknesses	Needs to be updated; remarkably little explicitly about wildfire
Online source	Only the Record of Decision seems to be available online: https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/lup/70447/92777/111784/Bishop_RMP_ROD_1993_w_app_glossary_508.pdf

Name of Process	Draft Programmatic EIS for Fuels Reduction and Rangeland Restoration in the Great Basin
Timeline	2020
Convenor	Bureau of Land Management
Entities involved	Bureau of Land Management and numerous stakeholders and interested parties
Geographic area	BLM lands in the Great Basin (about 223 million acres)
Strengths	Guiding documents for massive program of fuels treatments in Great Basin
Weaknesses	Little specific to the Bishop Resource Area
Online source	https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/nepa/122968/20015528/250020679/FRRR_DraftPEIS_Volume1.pdf

Name of Process	Fire Management Plan
Timeline	Completed in 2004
Convenor	Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Field Office
Entities involved	Bureau of Land Management
Geographic area	Mono County and Owens Valley portion of Inyo County
Strengths	N/A
Weaknesses	N/A
Online source	Document not found online; only citation in LADWP 2010: Bureau of Land Management. 2004. Fire Management Plan. Bishop Field Office, Bishop, California.

Name of Process	Land Management Plan for the Inyo National Forest
Timeline	Multi-year process completed in 2019
Convenor	Inyo National Forest
Entities involved	Inyo National Forest and numerous stakeholders and interested parties
Geographic area	Inyo National Forest
Strengths	The “strategic fire management zones” section of chapter 3 and the fire-related actions in appendix B are most relevant
Weaknesses	The partnership approach of appendix C would have been stronger with more specifics and some actual examples
Online source	https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd664404.pdf

Name of Process	Reds Meadow Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project
Timeline	2018-2019
Convenor	Inyo National Forest
Entities involved	Inyo National Forest and long list agencies and interested parties (see pg. 39-40 in EA)
Geographic area	About 2,100 acres just west of Minaret Summit and the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area
Strengths	A large-scale fuel reduction project for the Inyo NF
Weaknesses	Documents could have provided a more thorough rationale for the project to persuade more skeptical members of the public
Online source	https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/109635_FSPLT3_5252697.pdf

Name of Process	Land and Resource Management Plan for Toiyabe National Forest
Timeline	1986
Convenor	Toiyabe National Forest
Entities involved	Toiyabe National Forest and numerous stakeholders and interested parties
Geographic area	Part of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Strengths	Still the guiding document for the western portion of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Weaknesses	Seriously outdated; plan has not been updated since merger with Humboldt National Forest
Online source	https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5143054.pdf

Utilities

Name of Process	Owens Valley Land Management Plan
Timeline	1997-2010
Convenor	Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
Entities involved	Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Inyo County Water Department, California Dept. of Fish and Game
Geographic area	Owens Valley (City of Los Angeles owned lands)
Strengths	Overview of LADWP's policies regarding fire; other chapters (such as cultural resources and adaptive mgmt.) have valuable material related to vegetation mgmt.
Weaknesses	Fire management chapter is quite short (7 pages) and the section on controlled burns is very limited in scope
Online source	https://www.inyowater.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Owens-Valley-Land-Management-Plan-Final.pdf Chapter 7 on Fire Management

Name of Process	Wildfire Mitigation Plan
Timeline	2018-2020
Convenor	Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

Entities involved	Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, CAL FIRE, California Public Utilities Commission
Geographic area	City of Los Angeles, Owens Valley, power line corridors
Strengths	Presumably consistent with the requirements of SB901; data mgmt. tools under development may have application beyond utility service area
Weaknesses	Vegetation management section (4.3) lacks detail
Online source	https://ladwp.com/ladwp/faces/ladwp/aboutus/a-power/AboutUs-Power-Wildfire

Name of Process	2020-2022 Wildfire Mitigation Plan, Revision 2
Timeline	2018-2020
Convenor	Southern California Edison
Entities involved	Southern California Edison, CAL FIRE, California Public Utilities Commission
Geographic area	SCE service area including most of Inyo and Mono counties, power line corridors
Strengths	Seemingly comprehensive for the utility's overall approach to wildfire hazard reduction; data mgmt. tools under development may have application beyond utility service area
Weaknesses	Sections on vegetation management (5.1.5 & 5.3.5) a bit thin
Online source	https://www.sce.com/sites/default/files/AEM/SCE 2020-2022 Wildfire Mitigation Plan.pdf

Current and future planning processes

There are several current and future planning processes happening in the region. Some are routine systematic project plans such as vegetation management plans of CAL FIRE (some of which are coordinated with LADWP), hazardous fuel reduction by the Bishop Paiute Tribe, and power line corridor work by LADWP and Southern California Edison. Other agency planning processes of 2020 that cover larger areas are briefly described below.

Alpine County is working on a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Plan during 2020 and 2021 to build upon existing plans. The goal of this effort is to “enable the County to implement activities that address the risk of wildfire and that can reduce wildfires that could impact communities” (<http://alpinecountyca.gov/index.aspx?nid=504>). The anticipated result will be prioritization of fuel reduction projects throughout Alpine County and planning and CEQA/NEPA analysis of three specific projects. The first workshop on the plan was held in February 2020 and the next is scheduled for April 28, 2020. The planning was funded by CAL FIRE through a Fire Prevention Grant. The consultants working on the plan are Panorama Environmental, Inc. and Spatial Informatics Group. Alpine County is also proceeding with its annual biomass (burn) pile event during selected days in late April and May 2020.

The Inyo National Forest is continuing to work on its Eastern Sierra Fire Restoration and Maintenance Project (Inyo National Forest, 2020). This INF-wide effort seeks to increase the scale and rate of prescribed burning to reduce the impact of wildfires and maintain desired ecological conditions where fire naturally occurred at much greater frequencies than over the past century. The non-wilderness areas of the INF that could potentially be treated under this program cover about 200,000 acres. The public scoping process concluded in January 2020, and the INF is currently working with the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District to

determine effective practices and acceptable impacts with respect to smoke from prescribed fires.

Another large-scale planning process for part of the Inyo National Forest will begin later this year. In early March, the board of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy approved funding for the Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resilience Project (ESCCRP, locally to be known as the “donut” project). This effort will have a planning area of about 55,000 acres surrounding the town of Mammoth Lakes. This ring around the town is covered with decadent red fir and Jeffrey pine stands where fires have been thoroughly suppressed for decades. The current fuel loads surrounding the town could support a high-severity wildfire, which could destroy much of the town. This project seeks to create a path to implement one of the boldest fuels-reduction projects yet proposed in the Sierra Nevada, anticipate potential barriers and means to overcome such obstacles, build public support, identify the resources and financial support necessary for implementation, and establish a basis for subsequent detailed and site-specific planning and initial implementation actions. The project should formally begin in early summer.

After reading or skimming the various plans for the eastern Sierra Nevada region and interviewing many of the people active in fire mitigation efforts in the region, we believe the region is well served by broad general-purpose plans (e.g., county-wide hazard mitigation plans, county-wide community wildfire protection plans, Inyo National Forest Land Management Plan). Now, most importantly, the region needs prioritized actions and projects based on and recommended by the existing plans.

With respect to planning, there are still needs to update, fine-tune, and improve existing plans as well as narrow the geographic scope of CWPP efforts down to individual communities as exemplified by the Mammoth Lakes and Wheeler Crest CWPPs. To maximize the utility of the next generation of plans as well as be fiscally conservative, we suggest a hybrid model for preparing future plans and updates. This framework for future plans should include the following: the project should be directed by an employee of a county, town, fire district, local agency, or non-profit organization, such as a fire safe council; a local committee of 3 to 5 people including elected officials and citizens should oversee the process to ensure it is meeting the pre-determined goals; one or more consultants should be hired to perform the specialty services the particular plan may require; local people with local knowledge should write the sections about local geography and conditions (ideally under simple contracts for modest amounts of time and compensation administered by a non-profit). Well-compensated consultants should not be hired to do the simple work (e.g., cut-and-paste from other reports, grab defensible-space handouts from the internet, etc.). There is a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and experience available within the eastern Sierra Nevada region that can be readily tapped to help prepare future plans and updates.

Collaboratives and Partnerships

There are several formal multi-stakeholder collaboratives or collaborative efforts that currently exist in the East subregion, though most of the examples of stakeholders working together are formal and informal one-on-one partnerships.

Alpine Biomass Collaborative (ABC): This 501(c)(3) organization is focused on improving forest and watershed health while developing the local economy. ABC received a capacity building grant in 2016 from the National Forest Foundation. The Collaborative is comprised of

local, state, and federal agencies and organizations as well as the Washoe Tribe. The group meets monthly, and meetings usually include a presentation by a guest speaker. The scope of the group's efforts at this time is limited to Alpine County. It appears that the organizational tasks of the collaborative fall to volunteer board members who are willing to commit time and energy, and the future of the group is dependent on these volunteers and champions. The board member we interviewed expressed a desire to have some minimal/baseline funding to pay for a part-time staff member. Alpine Biomass Collaborative recently completed a scoping study that examines increasing economic development through biomass utilization (<https://alpinebiomasscommittee.wordpress.com/downloads/>).

Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership (ESSRP): We have not yet formally interacted with this group, though we are tracking its activities and progress. This collaborative has seven signatories. At this stage, the ESSRP is conducting outreach and stakeholder meetings to gather input and ideas at a very broad level. As we understand it, there will likely be a nexus opportunity with RFFCP down the road, at which time we can discuss shared interests around ecosystem health and ecosystem services. The public workshops have been postponed at this time because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but we will attend some of the workshops once they re-start later this year.

Alpine County Wildfire Risk Mitigation Plan: Alpine County recently received a fire mitigation planning grant from CAL FIRE. The work of this grant is supposed to result in 3-4 shovel ready projects. We include this effort in this discussion of collaboratives because the grant includes a steering committee comprised of all pertinent stakeholders in Alpine County. The steering committee has approved the hiring of a consultant. The grant term is through the end of 2020, by which time projects will be identified.



Mono County Solid Waste Task Force (SWTF): As described on its website, the Mono County Solid Waste Task Force is a

“diverse group of citizens with a stake in the operations of the Solid Waste Program in Mono County. The group is governed by a set of bylaws that were adopted in May 2015 by both the Mono County Board of Supervisors as well as the Town of Mammoth Lakes Town Council. Members include waste haulers and

recyclers, representatives from the construction and lodging industries, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, Mammoth Community Water District, and members at large. The primary purpose of the group is to advise elected officials on matters relating to the Solid Waste Program.”

Meetings are held at least semi-annually and more frequently if necessary. Among the topics

currently being discussed by the task force are a composting facility and a biomass facility. The Mono County Solid Waste Superintendent leads the task force and convenes and facilitates meetings.

Mammoth Lakes Basin Project: Though not a formal collaborative, three entities came together to plan, apply for, and implement a 630-acre fuels treatment project in the Lakes Basin adjacent to Mammoth Lakes. The three partners – Inyo National Forest, Mammoth Community Water District, and Mammoth Lakes Fire Safe Council – all have defined responsibilities within the project. The Inyo National Forest provided the NEPA analysis and is overseeing the on-the-ground work. The INF has also done some outreach to Lakes Basin property owners. Mammoth Community Water District is providing assistance with grant administration and leads the community outreach efforts. Mammoth Fire Safe Council is the grantee for the project. Other entities, such as Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Mono County, and Southern California Edison, have contributed various resources (direct funding, lodging, etc.) but are not part of the core group implementing the grant.

Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resilience Project (ESCCRP): Also known as the “donut” project, this initiative is just getting off the ground through an SNC grant to Plumas Corporation. The initial effort will be to develop a stakeholder collaborative, which is expected to be extensive, to move forward to planning and implementation of the project. The introductory meetings will likely be delayed due to COVID-19. It is expected that the East subregion RFFCP grant staff will be an integral part of the development of this project.

Inyo-Mono Integrated Regional Water Management Program (IRWMP): Although this collaborative effort is focused on water and watershed health, it is an example of a truly region-wide (minus Alpine County but including all of Inyo County and parts of Kern and San Bernardino Counties) multi-stakeholder effort that has been functional for over a decade and gets work done on the ground, including capacity building, technical assistance, project development, and project implementation.

Analysis: Most of these collaborative efforts are local – focusing on a watershed or a community. Two efforts are county-wide. The ESSRP and IRWMP are the two region-wide efforts and are also the only collaborative efforts that include Inyo County. The California Fire Safe Council and Inyo County Office of Emergency Services (OES) are working with some Inyo County stakeholders with the idea of forming (or in some cases, re-forming) fire safe councils. Inyo County OES hopes that some coordination and collaboration could happen among these councils.

Given that most of these collaboratives have been formed in response to particular efforts or projects, they seem to already have the stakeholder participation that they require. A more proactive effort, such as starting new fire safe councils or a stakeholder process formed through this program, would require more deliberative outreach and inclusion of multiple types of stakeholders.

Although the number of multi-stakeholder collaboratives in the East subregion is fairly small, this belies the fact that numerous one-on-one formal and informal partnerships exist, largely between federal land management agencies (such as the Forest Service and BLM) and local

stakeholders (fire safe councils, counties, fire departments). CAL FIRE and LADWP also play large roles in the region and interact with virtually every type of stakeholder.

The Owens Valley Tribes are very much a part of these one-on-one partnerships. They work with non-Tribal local agencies, CAL FIRE, LADWP, and the federal land management agencies. They are not part of any of the multi-stakeholder collaboratives listed above (although their participation in the ESSRP is unknown) with the exception of the IRWMP, in which they have been integral participants from the beginning.

The existing collaboratives and partnerships already have *modi operandi* for meeting and carrying out business. However, trainings aimed at improving skills around running meetings and finding, applying for, and administering grants would likely be welcomed.

Pilot/Demonstration Projects

Based on our interviews, there was no obvious candidate project that was underway (or about to get underway) that could serve as a demonstration project for the region. Through our interviews, we were able to develop an initial list of potential projects that could be implemented in the region. This working list can be found in Appendix B. No doubt many more project ideas will be uncovered through the process of this grant, and we will pursue all project ideas as best we can. However, ***two projects stood out above the rest in terms of importance to the region as expressed by multiple stakeholders, readiness, and ability to be implemented on a fairly short time scale: home hardening and visitor education and outreach.***

Home hardening

Many of the people interviewed mentioned “home hardening” as a necessary but underappreciated step in improving community resilience to wildfire. As an example of the low-profile nature of home hardening, one volunteer fire fighter we spoke with was unaware of the concept. Several people described home hardening as the most cost-effective measure for reducing wildfire damage and as “low-hanging fruit” in the spectrum of defensive preparations for wildfire.

As one pilot/demonstration project for the East geography, we propose to build awareness of the benefits and techniques of home hardening and promote implementation on residential and commercial structures throughout the region.

This project would consist of several components:

- Utilize (and modify for local conditions) existing resources and information
- Public education via content on existing websites of the three counties and local media
- Public education via community workshops after public meetings are deemed safe
- Educational workshops for Fire Safe Councils, Mono County RPACs, and other groups
- Policy workshops for elected officials and others on fairness and equity issues
- Involvement of local contractors and related businesses
- Engagement of insurance industry to provide incentives
- Investigation of opportunities for grants, loans, and subsidies
- Explore role of Inyo-Mono Advocates for Community Action to help low-income people
- Explore opportunities for demonstration / interpretive sites at public buildings

Scope: entire East geography

Potential Partnerships: Alpine, Mono, and Inyo Counties, Town of Mammoth Lakes, City of Bishop, Tribes, Fire Safe Councils, fire departments, Mono County Regional Planning Advisory Committees (RPAC), businesses, insurance industry

Community and Tribal Involvement: hopefully all communities and Tribes in the geography will be involved

Although education will be a long-term effort (it is never done), the basic work establishing the programs can be accomplished by December 2021.

Innovation: Home hardening as a major strategy for community wildfire preparedness has not been promoted in the East geography. We are not aware of active participation of insurance industry and business community in home hardening programs in other areas. Equity and fairness issues of subsidies for home hardening have had little discussion.

Evaluation and reporting: None yet; project is just being proposed.

Visitor education and outreach

One of the most common themes we heard from stakeholders of all types is the need for education and outreach, particularly to visitors to the region, to improve awareness of activities that exacerbate fire risk and threats to ecosystem health. While most people agreed that education is also necessary for local residents, the lack of knowledge and awareness among visitors (including second homeowners) seemed to be of primary concern.

As a second pilot/demonstration project for the East geography, we propose to develop an outreach and education campaign around fire awareness and ecosystem health aimed at visitors and second homeowners. We have already identified a possible funding source through the California Fire Safe Council Grants Clearinghouse.

Although not fully developed, this project might include the following components:

- Creation of signage and materials promoting fire awareness at campgrounds and trailheads
- Development of a marketing campaign with a consistent look across the region that targets visitors at such locations as restaurants, coffee shops, and hotels
- Providing support to the large land management agencies (Forest Service, BLM, LADWP) in their efforts to do outreach and



education

- Hold “fire-side chats” at recreation locations (such as campgrounds) and in towns to provide information and education about fire and the region’s ecosystems
 - Some of these events could be targeted to children

Scope: Entire East subregion

Potential Partnerships: ESSRP, Inyo and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forests, BLM, LADWP, CAL FIRE, Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties, Town of Mammoth Lakes, Fire Safe Councils in areas with recreation (such as Twin Lakes, June Lake, Mammoth Lakes), Tribes, fire departments, businesses

Community or Tribal involvement: We would intend to seek out and encourage involvement from all interested East subregion communities and Tribes.

Although education will be a long-term effort (it is never done), the basic work establishing the programs can be accomplished by December 2021.

Innovation: Currently, there is no consistent, focused effort on visitor education around fire awareness and ecosystem health in the East subregion. We will of course look for examples in other geographies, but not having heard of such a program before, this effort could create a model to be followed by other Sierra Nevada regions.

Evaluation and reporting: No evaluation or reporting metrics have been developed yet as this project is just being created.

Planning for What’s Next

Phase II of the East subregion RFFCP involves creating a planning process to identify and prioritize ecosystem health and fire prevention projects, as well as build capacity, for the East Geography. Our initial work during the assessment phase suggests a few paths forward: (1) formation of a collaborative group modeled roughly on the Inyo-Mono IRWM Program, (2) providing capacity building opportunities to local stakeholders (see Capacity Building Plan), (3) developing the two pilot/demonstration projects discussed in the previous section, and (4) promoting and assisting where possible the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) to create a position of “wildfire mitigation coordinator” or something fulfilling that general concept (see Recommendations section).

Formation of a collaborative process for Alpine, Mono, and Inyo Counties would be a preferred means of identifying and prioritizing projects. The Inyo-Mono IRWMP may offer some useful experience and lessons learned for regional collaborative approaches to reducing risks from wildfire. The project submittal and ranking process used by the Inyo-Mono IRWM Program appears to have potential for adaptation to prioritizing wildfire mitigation projects. The experience of the Lahontan Funding Area of the state’s IRWM Program may provide an example of transforming a highly competitive grant process into an equitable means of distributing limited state funds.

During our interviews, almost everyone expressed an interest in a regional collaborative process to help with wildfire issues. Despite near-universal support for such a concept and recognition

that a regional approach will be valuable, there were personal reservations about yet another task by overworked agency personnel and over-committed community volunteers. When a collaborative is launched, it must offer clear value and not be just another meeting to attend.

Although a region-wide stakeholder collaborative process is desired for the East subregion, we discovered through our interviews that there are some significant differences in how the three counties approach wildfire mitigation. We think that, using the two pilot/demonstration projects as an initial effort, we will be able to convene stakeholders at a regional scale but that some activities of this program may need to be operated at the county (or smaller) level.



The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments was formed in 1995, but only became a Joint Powers Authority in January 2020. As such, the ESCOG is now an independent legal entity that can operate separately from its four members (Inyo County, Mono County, Town of Mammoth Lakes, and City of Bishop) although presumably in ways to benefit the citizens of the entire region. The ESCOG has been proposed as the ideal entity to employ one or more people to oversee, plan, coordinate, work with local fire safe councils, and administer programs and projects to reduce wildfire hazards and improve ecosystem health throughout the two counties. Although Alpine County would not benefit directly from such an arrangement, we believe that creating at least one wildfire-mitigation staff position within ESCOG would provide coordination benefits to a large fraction of the East geography.

Recommendations

As we conducted interviews and reviewed plans, many ideas were

revealed or created that seemed to be useful in the broad realm of wildfire mitigation. This list of recommendations is merely an initial attempt to record many of the good ideas that surfaced. As we proceed, this list will be refined and organized to target different audiences for different types of recommendations. This list is *not* intended as a “to-do” list for the East subregion RFFCP team; it would not be possible to address all these items within the current grant. At a later time, we plan to excerpt the dozens (perhaps hundreds) of recommendations found within the many

plans for the region and organize them in one or more logical arrangements (geography, priority, governmental responsibility, scale, etc.).

- Implement the recommendations of the many existing plans, especially those of the CWPPs
- Create at least one position for a wildfire mitigation specialist or coordinator (or similar title) in the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments
 - This concept is not new; the generation of CWPPs created a decade ago, as well as agency staff, cited this need
 - Possible responsibilities: development of annual operating plans, coordinating with community groups, providing public information and education, increasing volunteer firefighters, and grant writing and management
- Provide baseline funding for fire safe councils, perhaps including for county- (or larger) level coordinators
- Strongly encourage the U.S. Forest Service, at the regional or national level, to address the lack of staffing in individual National Forests that hamstrings existing personnel from adequately and proactively addressing fire and ecosystem health concerns
- When plans regarding wildfire mitigation are prepared in the future, the agencies involved need to utilize local expertise and not just consulting firms from outside the region
 - Local people with local knowledge should write the sections about local geography and conditions
 - Such work could be conducted under simple contracts for modest amounts of time and compensation administered by a non-profit organization
- Perform needs assessments for each fire district
- Investigate potential roles of insurance industry
 - Learn more about how the insurance industry and CAL FIRE identify and map fire risk
 - Learn about the barriers to changing risk designations (e.g., even after fuel has burned)
- Explore incentives for investment in biomass energy facilities
- Explore potential role for venture capital in biomass facilities and fuel reduction projects
 - Alpine County could host a large facility to handle material exported from Tahoe basin
- Explore solutions to barriers to building biomass energy facilities
- Explore incentives for creation of more local businesses to perform fuels treatments
 - County economic development staff could help in this effort
- Develop functional business model for distributing home-heating firewood to low-income residents
- Explore potential for creation of one or more tribal-based businesses modeled after the Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions (CHIPS) corporation
- Establish a California Conservation Corps “base” in the eastern Sierra Nevada
- Compare approaches to neighborhood/community woody-debris disposal
- Develop semi-generic CEQA and NEPA documents for fuels treatments that need only some site-specific additions; alternatively, prepare programmatic environmental documents that can be applied to individual fuels treatment projects with some site-specific additions

- Increase the training capacity for archaeological surveyors – apparently the week-long training courses are in high demand with long waiting lists
- Streamline the processes for archaeological and cultural-resources surveys beginning with the records request
- Compile approaches (local ordinances [e.g., El Dorado County], peer pressure, CWPPs, etc.) for dealing with fuel loads on unoccupied lots and analyze effectiveness, costs, trade-offs, etc.
- Form a “task force” of representatives of granting agencies and some recipients (perhaps similar to the California Financing Coordinating Committee model) to thoroughly examine current processes for funding fuels mitigation work and develop new approaches
 - If starting fresh, how could funding mechanisms work with a minimum of “busy work” for applicants, while selecting the “best” (using clear criteria) projects, and ensuring financial efficiency and accountability?
- Support research on management of cheatgrass and other invasive species
- Explore mechanisms for insuring fuels-reduction workers and contractors at lower cost
 - Can federal government indemnify contractors against liability on federal land?
- Learn the legal requirements about “prevailing wage” issues in different types of fuels work
- Look into existing educational materials and curricula about wildfire suitable for area schools
- Help Bodie State Historic Park develop and implement a wildfire mitigation plan
- Are there ways to streamline financial management for multiple entities involved in fuels mitigation projects (e.g., county role, special foundation with low overhead)?

Conclusion

As is often the case, the capacity of Eastern Sierra stakeholders has been underestimated by outside entities with limited knowledge of the geography, culture, and priorities of the region. Our local and regional agencies and organizations perform an impressive amount of work given the limited resources available to them. There is also room for building their capacity so that they can better meet their own needs. Having some kind of centralized structure for fire safe councils, local agencies, and fire departments would go a long way to increasing the capacity of the entire region to address fire-related issues. Increasing staffing at the federal agencies is another main concern and would need to be addressed at the national level. The RFFCP team in the East subregion (ECWA and Sierra Corps) is committed to working on these issues, and others, to help move the region forward in its thinking about and action toward creating more fire-aware and fire-resilient human and natural communities.

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