

Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement Fall 2020 Meeting

September 24, 2020 | Online

Meeting Summary

Sierra Institute hosted its bi-annual Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement (SCALE) Meeting on September 24, 2020. Over 84 participants from 14 collaboratives and other groups attended, in addition to multiple representatives from USFS, state agencies, and other partners. The meeting started with updates from the South Lassen Watershed Group and Yosemite Stanislaus Solution. Following this, two panels were held: “Navigating large-scale project planning & USFS Programs of Work,” and “Developing and Sustaining Biomass Businesses.” Additional speakers covered topics including “Federal Opportunities for Wood Products and Collaborative Forestry,” “CFLRP Successes and the Future of Landscape-Scale Collaboration,” and “California’s Shared Stewardship Agreement: What it means for Collaboratives.” The meeting finished with a listening session focused on the impacts of this year’s fire season.

Going forward, Sierra Institute will conduct outreach with collaborative groups and other partners to learn more about the impacts of this fire season and other priorities. These conversations are expected to inform future SCALE events.

Attendees

Amodio, John
Birkhoff, Juliana
Bittleman, Sarah
Bradfield, Danielle
Britting, Susan
Charneau, Marlon
Cook, Pam
Cowan, Emery
Dailey, Lindsay
Dante, Shane
Darlington, Christiana
Darner, Hinda
Di Vittorio, Sarah
Diesem, Linda
Drezner, Debbie
Driscoll, Matt
Elliott, Sheri
Eskildsen, Bergen
Estes, Becky
Featherman, David
Figueroa, Mel
Fisher, Konrad
Friedel, Chris
Goulette, Nick
Griffith, David
Gross, Shana
Gyant, Barnie
Hambrecht, Bob
Hanvelt, Randy

Hardigg, Karen
Harris, Jill
Harrison, Joshua
Hartman, Meagan
Harvey, Joe
Hatfield, Janet
Haze, Steve
Hepner, Hannah
Hertslet, Angel
Hoffman, Kristy
Hoppe-Glosser Thibault
Humphries, Shoana
Hunt, Luke
Johnson, Howell
Jones, Bobette
Jorgensen, Holly
King, Matt
Knight, Zach
Koepele, Patrick
Krempl, Byron
Kusel, Robert
Latimer, Luna
LeBlanc, Cathy
Logsdon, Terre
McAfee, Kimra
Meders-Knight, Ali
Meinert, Catherine
Merrill, Kristen
Miller, Regine

Musser, Cameron
Nagelson, Bryant
Oldson, Sarah
Osti, Amye
Palmieri, Brendan
Peterson, Liz
Pickard, Michael
Pixley, Jodie
Reckler, Sherry
Reidy, Katie
Reynolds, Justine
Roberts, Thurman
Rodgers, Terrance
Rougle, Wolfgang
Salmon, Andrew
Sheen, Kelly
Slusser, David
Smit, Madeline
Suba, Greg
Thomson, Allison
Vander Kolk, Elliott
Wall, Robin
White, Josh
Wilensky, Steve
Wilson, John
Wyrsh, Peter
Zelinsky, David

Keynote Speaker: Federal Stimulus Opportunities for Wood Products and Collaborative Forestry

Sarah Bittleman, Deputy Chief of Staff and Policy Director for U.S. Senator Ron Wyden, D-OR

- Collaboratives demonstrate a mechanism to support forest management and are at the forefront of the larger issue. They are uniquely qualified to help with this.
- Perspective of Democrats and Senator Wyden: The work of collaboratives is important and we aim to continue to fund and grow them. There is a need to ensure that growth and support is given in a meaningful way.
- The federal government needs to create organic spaces for collaboratives where groups can operate to be most effective. There is no one solution for each community.
- Legislation: Background on recent Wyden bills was given that includes more money for CFLRs. Fortunately, citizens care about their public lands and this helps to support this type of legislation.
- Advice to groups: "You're not in it by yourself"

Collaborative Updates

Kyle Rodgers - Sierra Institute | South Lassen Watersheds Group

- SLWG is making progress on meadow restoration and forest health projects at Rock Creek and Childs Meadow, as well as on the Robbers Creek Mini-Project.
- The West Shore Project is also progressing in the WUI area along the West Shore of Lake Almanor. This primarily involves forest health work.
- Lessons learned
 - Focus on building relationships
 - Create a common set of expectations as well as a common toolbox
 - Set up for success!
 - "For true collaboration, leaders and supervisors must implement organizational change in processes and in operation."

Byron Krempl - Tuolumne River Trust | Yosemite-Stanislaus Solutions

- Cited recent research by Fleishmann et al., 2020 saying that the decline in NEPA analyses is not due to policy, but due to a lack of resources to complete them.
- Update on the SERAL Project: a 117,000 acre landscape-scale project developed by USFS in consultation with YSS to increase the pace and scale of forest management on the Stanislaus National Forest
- YSS identified priority landscapes as well as priority treatments, including prescribed fire and thinning treatments
- Collaborative planning is ongoing, and PSW research station is developing a modeling tool for the SERAL project that can be applied to other large-scale projects in the future

Navigating Large-Scale Project Planning

Josh White - District Ranger, Colville National Forest | Mill Creek A-Z Project

- CNF faces the same forest and fire issues as most Western states, including California, in terms of fire, forestry, and collaborative work
- Stewardship contract, goods for services: How to get in USFS program of work
 - Trading harvested wood products for piling
 - Is it economically feasible to have a contractor do all of the work
- Contractor does all the pre-planning, gets all the wood products at the advertised rate
- Challenges: How can this be additive? Are we really making a difference? How to bring it into a larger program?
 - It is impactful for larger USFS projects: it takes maybe 10-15% the work to oversee the contractor rather than do the entire project, so it is truly additive
 - How do partners enter into this as a contractor? Need trust to ensure we're treating each other with respect
 - How do we ensure decision points are met so there's no conflict of interest with timber companies? Need to have sideboards and be careful
 - Need to bring employees along
 - There's a need to listen to partners, there's a willingness to actively engage
 - Connected with need to utilize authorities
 - Need to have healthy infrastructure and capacity-- important that USFS can't do this alone

Bobette Jones - Ecologist, Lassen National Forest

- USFS Programs of Work are complicated: The Program of Work is actually only one element in the business plan
 - Step 1: Determine the scope of the project and deliverables, plan for NEPA
 - Step 2: Identify every work item associated with the project and list its associated activities
- Once the Program of Work exists in the Forest Plan, funds are needed to support the budget for these activities. Planning and funding the workforce to support projects is also required.
- USFS is beholden to its field season, therefore project implementation is often April-Nov
- To move funds into procurement timeframe around March, you have a very narrow timeframe to ensure money is in place for field season projects
- Multiple mismatches occur when integrating collaborative projects into the Program of Work:
 - As USFS is building into a zone, to get approval the agency estimates who to hire before knowing its exact Program of Work
 - Priorities are influenced by project level, but stewardship funds enter at different times which adds another level of complexity
- Advice: Good business planning anticipates possible events and pre-planning helps avoid them
 - Priorities change annually, and lately weekly, with the fires
 - New decisions, including those that require a change in scope or new information, may need more time depending on the stage of process

- Key Points:
 - Programs of Work help ensure that all involved, including collaboratives, stay focused on the same goal and map out the work plan
 - Programs of work display project and USFS timelines
 - Stewardship requires negotiation, flexibility, and coordination

Shared Stewardship Agreement in CA: What it Means for Collaboratives

Barnie Gyant, Deputy Regional Forester, Region 5

- Shared Stewardship Agreement in California
 - The California Agreement is slightly different in that it includes all agencies that are involved in forest restoration (e.g. Tahoe Conservancy, WCB, CARB, NFWF, water boards, etc.)
 - Goal: Arrive at a place where 1M acres of land is treated by the State (CalFire, etc) and the federal government (USFS)
- What does this mean for collaboratives?
 - Collaboratives work with many of the partners/stakeholders that are part of meeting this 1M acre goal: Note again that the Agreement exists with more than the state
 - Collaboratives are part of this agreement – there are no exclusions
 - YSS and ACCG example: Through their meetings with the Forests, Caltrans, and other partners, this can help inform where to do work
 - USFS aims to examine Programs of Work (where past projects took place and where future projects are planned)- and this includes how USFS can work with collaboratives
- Upcoming Shared Stewardship Advisors to Help Utilize the Agreement
 - The National Fish and Wildlife Federation, in combination with USFS, developed four Shared Stewardship Advisor positions to increase the use of stewardship tools
 - NFWF is invested in positions until 2023, will be instrumental in helping make connections with all the different partners, helping line out grants, and deciding where priorities are
- Future of collaboratives
 - Even in three years, it is anticipated that collaboratives remain at the table and even more groups are involved and using shared stewardship tools
 - USFS Programs of Work should be better able to accommodate priorities - Right now each entity still has its own Program of Work, but over time, USFS will be thinking about how to streamline and align these better
- Shared Stewardship and Tribal Engagement
 - New tribal liaison recently appointed, but in general USFS is open to any work
 - Contact info: Rowena Yeahquo (707-980-0390)
- What kind of incentives might support the Agreement:
 - Incentives may be based on biomass targets, etc. – but first there is a need to settle the question of “what is the condition of the land that we want” which requires a change in how we talk about the outcomes of projects that we want as compared to project outputs
- USFS Staffing
 - USFS does not have the resources to do all the work, across the entire agency
 - This emphasizes the need for working with partners

- Example: CA Native Plant Society – might they help USFS do plant surveys given understaffing?
- The State and USFS agreed more than four years ago on a shared commitment to treating 1 million acres per year. What is different with this latest agreement?
 - Joint planning is the difference, using resources in a different way.

Sustaining Biomass Businesses & Supporting Workforce Development

Matt King, Renewable Energy Project Manager, Wallowa Resources

- Integrated Biomass Resources (IBR) is a partner of Wallowa Resources and has been operating as a wood products yard for about 10 years
- Goals of the business include: Restore ecosystem health and function, mitigate fire risk for communities, create and sustain family wage jobs through forest product development
- Efficiencies through in-forest sorting help cut down on costs
- Integrated aspect of the supply chain: Apart from pure saw logs, all of the remaining material is whole-tree yarded and sent to the facility
- These campus models can be combined with combined-heat and power production, but only at a certain scale is this feasible. This in part depends on electricity rates.
- Challenges: Matching product mix with available markets, debt can be dangerous for cash flow and it can be difficult to find equity partners, there is a lack of ancillary forest products businesses to support mill supply chain
- Feedstock sourcing: Limited due to lack of Stewardship Contracting
 - Have worked with 2 National Forests to get stewardship contracts, worked with collaboratives, not enough use of these tools yet

Steve Wilensky, Founder, Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions

- Continuing challenges related to forestry workforce development:
 - Logistics: Working with folks on basic good employee practices, addiction and personal health – it's not just getting people out there, but keeping them healthy
 - Increasing use of prescribed fire on the landscape continues to be challenging but CHIPS will continue to prioritize this
 - This year multiple planned prescribed fire trainings were put off due to Covid and wildfire
 - Basic prejudice toward Native Americans
 - Covid-19: being overly cautious because don't want to be the vector that causes outbreaks in multiple local Tribes
- Final statement: Economic and environmental benefits are easier to achieve than the community benefits that go with restoration – the human element of this work is most challenging

CFLRP Successes and the Future of Landscape-Scale Collaboration

Karen Hardigg, Executive Director of Wallowa Resources, Chair of CFLR Advisory Committee

- How do groups stand out as collaboratives?
 - Definition of collaborative is pretty vague, thus projects that stand out are those that really are clear in their definition, governance, have diverse partners at the table, and demonstrate USFS participation
 - Note that many submissions this year included large landscapes with > 1 collaboration
- CFLR Program 10 years ago compared to today:
 - More partners and tribes are now included as part of the proposed or existing groups
 - There is a greater emphasis on prescribed fire
 - Some successful applications focused on workforce development, and all proposals included a monitoring and evaluation component
- Future of CFLR Program:
 - Notably, CFLR has legitimized collaboratives as a way to get forest work done
 - Started after moment of crisis with timber wars and represented an opportunity for civil dialogue, which is more important than ever in these polarizing times
 - Groups help to build trust, which also helps with litigation
 - During this new moment of crisis: Opportunity to bring in additional Tribes, public utilities, etc.
- Word of Caution: There is a lack of precision and definition around collaboratives
 - Many have set up unrealistic expectations for what these groups can do, for example, collaboratives are unfairly being singled out for failure of forest restoration
 - Need to reframe the conversation and help rectify other nuanced issues that contribute to these (i.e. understaffing at agencies)
- Conclusion: CFLRs have an outside impact, can leverage significant capital and drive value in outcomes public wants to see
 - Since the advisory committee met, this year's program has yet to be approved, which is frustrating because work needs to be done this fall
 - Calls on new Congress to fully fund and consider larger investments in forest management, such as the recently introduced prescribed fire bill (Wyden, D-OR)

Fire Listening Session

- **Juliana Birkhoff** | Dinkey Collaborative
 - Lost some land, perhaps not as much as expected
 - Would like to communicate with district rangers, especially related to how the fire impacted Dinkey project landscapes
 - Clarify if fuel breaks helped
- **Ali Meders-Knight** | 2018 Farm Bill Liaison and TEK practitioner
 - Berry Creek, Feather Falls, Mooretown all encountered fires in 2020
 - Tribes are submitting bids for post-fire recovery and restoration but face competition from huge companies like Tetra Tech that do not employ local people

- Intertribal Stewardship Workforce Initiative (ISWI) worked to obtain FEMA contract for Camp Fire hazard tree removal, and put together chainsaw training for Tribal and non-Tribal local residents
 - Tribes entitled to FEMA disaster funds but agencies' habitual ways of contracting do not include them, have to push
 - Steve Wilensky: These huge companies get the contracts because they are designed for huge contracts – why not reinvest this restoration value in forests? There is a misalignment because many of the benefits then do not support the impacted communities
- Update: Used TEK to issue certificates of land management for workforce development, for example related to native plants
 - Aims to start new discussion on goods for services – too many people think CA started 180 years ago
 - These fires are forcing people to think about history as a way to help move forward
 - Different aspect of workforce development: Place-based TEK approach
 - Tribes should make own agreement with USFS on Shared Stewardship-- its sovereignty
 - Jonathan Kusel: SCALE might be able to help to address resources that come post-fire – there is a need to be cognizant of Tribes, community groups in those areas rather than large corporations
- **Hinda Darner**, Fuels Officer, Mendocino National Forest | FireScape Mendocino
 - Haven't had a chance to see how the August fire has impacted the collaboratives
 - Covid also has presented a considerable problem for FSM
 - Between Ranch and August Fires, very few acres unburned
 - How to look at post-fire recovery-- Would like to work on tribal engagement and incorporating TEK

Conclusion

Sierra Institute will be in touch with collaboratives, groups, and other partners over the next few months to learn more about the impacts of this fire season and other priorities. These conversations are expected to inform future SCALE events.