

Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement June 2021 Meeting

June 10th, 2021 Online

Meeting Summary

Sierra Institute hosted its Spring Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement (SCALE) meeting on June 10th, 2021 virtually over Zoom. The first half of the meeting focused on follow up to discussions around the 2020 wildfire season, which we covered extensively in our previous Winter meeting. The opening presentation provided a brief overview of main points and key takeaways from the last meeting, as a way to provide context and set the stage for topics covered throughout the day. This was followed by presentations from Suzanne Grimesey, Chief Quality Care Officer for the Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness and Joe Hostler, Air Quality Coordinator for the Yurok tribe, who provided presentations on smoke impacts from the 2020 wildfire season, as well as efforts to prepare for the upcoming season. Don Hankins, Professor of Geography and Planning at Chico State and executive committee member of the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force, then provided a presentation on the Inter-Tribal Indigenous Stewardship Project. The first half of the meeting then concluded with a panel discussion and presentations regarding tribal workforce development through a High Roads Training Partnership project in forest restoration. After a break, the second half of the meeting focused on landscape-scale restoration work. Patrick Wright, Manager of the California Wildfire and Resilience Taskforce outlined next steps on the Action plan and outlined goals and next steps of the Taskforce. This was followed by a panel of collaborative representatives who outlined their projects and efforts in going to scale. Finally, the meeting concluded with wrap-up comments from Jessica Morse, Deputy Secretary for Forest Resource Management for the California Natural Resources Agency.

Opening Presentation: “Recap of Winter Meeting- The 2020 Wildfire Season: From a Landscape, Community, and Tribal Perspective.”

Corrinne Scieszka- Project Specialist, Sierra Institute for Community and Environment

- In the last SCALE meeting, we set out to cover impacts from the 2020 wildfire season, and conducted interviews with our collaborators and stakeholders prior as a means to inform topics that we covered. The interviews were incredibly informative and impactful to shaping our understanding of how people experienced the fire season.

- Collaborative groups that experienced fire on their landscapes had to deal with focus shifts from restoration, to analyzing burned area, salvage and recovery, and reforestation. Even groups that didn't experience fire directly on their landscapes were not immune from impacts, as lowered capacity from redirected FS employees, and smoke restrictions, impeded their ability to conduct project work.
- From a community standpoint, participants shared their experiences of having been evacuated, and of infrastructure and property loss. Tribal representatives discussed having lost ancestral homelands, as well as cultural sites and resources to the fires.
- It became clear early on from these discussions that impacts from the 2020 wildfire season could not be discussed in isolation from other compounding disasters. Increasingly severe wildfires year after year have long term implications, both physically in terms of landscape and property damage, as well as mentally, for collaborative groups and communities.
- The COVID 19 pandemic also overlapped with and exacerbated existing fire effects- and COVID and smoke restrictions interacted synergistically in a way that not only made it more difficult to conduct project work, but also proved to be much more mentally taxing for people.
- Ultimately, COVID response, fire response, and fire recovery all combined in a way which required stakeholders in many instances to operate at full capacity.
- In moving forward, we need to think about how to safely expand the use of low-intensity prescribed fire across landscapes, enact thinning treatments that benefit not only the health of rural communities, but also their economies, and development a forest restoration economy that is equitable. In regard to the last point, we need to ensure that tribal members have a voice and role in managing their ancestral homelands, as well as build capacity and create opportunities to integrate TEK and cultural burning practices into existing restoration efforts and processes.

Follow Up to Our Winter Meeting: Responding to Wildfire and Smoke

Suzanne Grimesey, Chief Quality Care and Strategy Officer, Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness

- Suzanne has worked with the Department of Behavioral Wellness for Santa Barbara County for about 25 years. When there is a wildfire or other high stress event in the community, she deploys to the emergency operation center and is involved in communications and the county's behavioral health response.
- She has worked with multiple wildfire and mass casualty events and recognizes the cumulative trauma of fires on communities and collaboratives.
- Trauma manifests itself in a number of ways that are not necessarily quantifiable or tracked by official tallies.

- Cumulative and vicarious trauma exist in communities where fire has occurred, and smoke can be a trigger. The county focused their efforts on schools, first responders, and individuals.
- Wildfire survivors can develop PTSD symptoms, and substance abuse and domestic violence rise after fires occur.
- Communities and people do recover, but there are phases to community disaster response and resiliency.
- Santa Barbara County deploy mental health clinicians to burn sites once they are reopened to the public, especially for people who live in the area.
- A community wellness team was developed by the Behavioral Wellness Department after the Thomas fire to provide intensive outpatient care and debriefings.
- Next steps are to formalize a disaster behavioral health role and team to mitigate the impacts experienced from high stress events and create resilience among people, teams, and communities in preparation for the next wildfire event.

Joe Hostler, Air Quality Coordinator, Yurok Tribe

- The Yurok tribe is California's largest tribe with 6,000 members across 56,000 acres of reservation, with 47,000 more coming.
- They experience clean air for most of the year, except smoke during the summer for 14 of the last 20 years.
- In response to smoke events, the tribal council will declare disaster due to fire conditions and open breathing respite shelters in community centers, distribute HEPA filters to vulnerable people, distribute N95 masks, and conduct door-to-door welfare checks.
- Shelter in place can be complicated through homelessness, substandard housing, and a lack of AC or electricity.
- They collaborate with Wildfire Smoke Air Resource Advisors and Fire Incident Management to contribute local knowledge for PSA's, to proactively engage with state and federal emergency agencies on smoke planning and monitoring, and to collaborate with adjacent state air districts.
- Prolonged fire can cause fatigue and impatience, and not all tribes have an air quality staff.
- They use infographics and resources to educate their community (how to build a filter with a box fan, for example).
- The Yurok Tribe is working on reintroducing prescribed fire- their climate adaptation planning calls for more "good" fire, and they are working on reviving prescribed burning through Tribal crews.

Presentation on the Inter-Tribal Indigenous Stewardship Project

Don Hankins, Professor of Geography and Planning, Chico State; Executive Committee Member of the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force

- The Inter-Tribal Indigenous Stewardship Project is an initiative that Don is currently co-leading. It is focused on furthering tribal stewardship in a way that is Indigenous-led. It is focused on progressing community health and well-being and supporting traditional livelihoods, while being guided by Indigenous traditions and cultural values.
- It seeks to facilitate stewardship through learning and training with Indigenous leadership, policy initiatives, and finding equitable solutions to funding opportunities.
- Why Indigenous fire and stewardship? Indigenous fire practices are distinct from other fire management in the context of traditional law, objectives, outcomes, and the right to burn. This work is important to rebuilding resilient landscapes and cultures.
- Outreach and surveys were conducted to review who/how/where people are involved in Indigenous fire and stewardship, barriers or issues they may be facing, and what the future looks like in this area. All lands in the state are ancestral lands and most practitioners are unpaid volunteers. Work is needed to ensure that people can be paid for this work. Identified barriers included access, liability and fear of fire, 'qualifications,' funding, capacity, racism, 'invisibility', and policy. In terms of a vision of the future, learning and training should be native-led, and support youth.
- They hope to create eco-cultural regions across the state, as culture is based on the landscape from which people are from, and they may want to work across boundaries. There are a lot of synergies between where and how people are working together; and there is a lot of work already taking place across the state.
- A redistribution of funds is planned to create pilot projects.
- Indigenous-led policies and opportunities:
 - Law of the Land (Indigenous)- fire is a natural process, and the landscape speaks to the need to burn. Policy reform is needed at multiple levels to recognize natural law
 - Convention of Biodiversity and UNDRIP (International)- Indigenous people have the right to steward their ancestral territories.
 - PL 93-638/ B 10 11 (Federal/State-Tribal)- tribes, tribal organizations, and tribal individuals have the right to self-determination and stewardship within ancestral territory. Work is needed with traditional cultural practitioners to establish stewardship landscapes and prioritization for shared stewardship.
 - Clean Air Act- WRAP (Federal)- Indigenous fire can be treated as a natural and unregulated source of emissions.
 - Traditional Gathering Policy (Federal-Tribal in California)- seeks to facilitate traditional management techniques on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Lands
- For those interested in learning more about some of the barriers to cultural and Rx fire, here is a report which Don contributed to on the topic:
<https://karuktribeclimatechangeprojects.com/good-fire/>

Panel: Landscape-Scale Restoration Work Through the High Roads Training Partnership

Irvin Jim, Chairman of Woodfords Washoe, Southern Band of the Washoe Tribe; Board President, Intertribal Council; District 3 Supervisor, Alpine County

- Tribal crews working on their lands is important for tribal homelands. The Washoe tribe is one of the few tribes that didn't get kicked out of their homelands, however, current society impedes the ability of the Washoe to tend to the land.
- Crews are excited to do the work, but creating fair payment for the work is posing a challenge. Crews need to make enough money to support their families, but State agencies say tribal crews are too expensive. Talks need to happen to make pay competitive and make it beneficial for both parties- the cheapest option isn't always the best option for the land and people.
- Tribal stewardship on ancestral homelands has a positive impact on the community- he sees a sense of pride in young people because they are helping their elders and are community-oriented. This stewardship is all-inclusive in the community.

Rick Fleming, Field Crew Director, Big Sandy Rancheria

- Rick's workforce development crews pull from four Tribes in the area, along with non-Indigenous workers.
- When an agency is looking at the cost, they're not seeing the real cost. When the money leaves the community, it has negative societal impacts. From a tribal perspective, having pride in inter-tribal work leads to cascading positive impacts in the community.
- Rick is involved in workforce development that trains members in a diverse array of jobs, and focuses on having sustainable jobs that offer stability.

Steve Wilenksy, President, Calaveras Healthy Impact Solutions (CHIPS)

- CHIPS is an 18-year-old nonprofit founded by the Miwok communities in Calaveras county, along with ex-millworkers. They have 55 employees in 6 counties, and are affiliated with 6 tribes.
- Current threats to the Sierra include massive bug-kill, mega-fires, severe drought, and 130 mph winds blowing down trees.
- In regard to who's going to clean up this mess, siloed budgets and land management jurisdictions are not working. There is a need to look back at what worked for the Sierra prior to western influences.
- The High Roads Training Partnership seeks to answer these questions:
 - How do we get people with no vehicle/licenses to remote work sites?

- How do we deal with post-genocide communities?
- How do we deal with the high cost of worker's comp?
- How do we draw from 10,000 years of good stewardship and fund TEK restoration? Let's embrace that history and find a way forward.
- How do we overcome substance abuse issues when recruiting a workforce?
- How do we get OES/FEMA/PG&E and others to fund **local** groups to do the work for fair pay?
- There are many native crews doing great work across California, why not repatriate the land to Indigenous communities?

Discussion of the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force and Next Steps

Patrick Wright, Manager of the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force

- There was a revitalized task force meeting on May 20th, and the task force leadership has been expanded to include Randy Moore, OPR, RCRC, and Don Hankins, and is now less state focused.
- They are attempting to overview the state of things now, and put together strategies for coordinating state and federal efforts to support local activities for fire. They want to put more tools in the hands of local collaboratives.
- They are working to create a common and flexible framework statewide and hope to lift everyone up by letting go of the top-down system, and becoming more collaborative.
- There are three different levels of activity at the regional, sub-regional, and collaborative levels. The regional level bypasses a lot of work of collaboratives, and uses a regional framework to advise, work for funding, and provide tools to accelerate, not dictate, local work. There is \$100 million currently planned for capacity building. The collaborative level is focused on forest health and community resilience, and the sub-regional level can bring these two together, and deal with larger issues, like climate change and forestry management.
- The next meeting is in August, with more regionally available meetings coming.
- Tracking restoration work and synthesizing data is a top priority- there are currently state and federal systems, but this is not comprehensive or all-inclusive. There is a need to get reporting aligned among agencies, and then get this data into the hands of regional/collaborative groups.
- There was concern expressed about ground level action and implementation of goals in the resilience plan, specifically getting the \$100 million directly where the work is going to be done. Patrick responded that RCDs and regionally-based conservancies have received a good chunk of the money so they can put themselves in a position to receive on the ground money from CalFire and other agencies. They are looking at building capacity of a new program for doing prescribed burns, and additional capacity building

across the state. Additionally, sub-regional strategies are building 10-20 year plans of work through block grants rather than one-off grants, providing longevity and assurance of projects for private sector investment on the workforce and wood utilization side. The Fall in-person SCALE meeting between collaborative groups and the task force will be an opportunity to further these discussions.

Panel: Landscape-Scale Restoration

Ed Smith, Senior Forest Ecologist and Fire Manager, The Nature Conservancy and Andrew Salmon, Forest Conservation Program Manager and Forest Health Watershed Coordinator, South Yuba River Citizens League (North Yuba Project)

- The North Yuba Forest Partnership Project is a 275,000-acre project, consisting of multiple partners and funding sources.
- Their partnership goals are to improve forest health and resilience, reduce risk of wildfire, protect and secure water supplies, and support the development of a local restoration economy.
- Their approach is unique, as they working at such a large scale, and are using a staged and sequential condition-based NEPA. For their proposed landscape-scale NEPA approach:
 - LiDAR, HRV, TCSI, and other high-resolution data and modeling will be used to develop and analyze the proposed action and alternatives
 - Surveys will be conducted for areas that will be implemented first
 - EA or EIS will be prepared analyzing actions across the entire landscape
 - The initial Record of Decision/Decision Notice would authorize the implementation of sub-projects where surveys have been completed and adopt any project specific forest plan amendments
 - Subsequent project planning will then occur in which surveys will be conducted for additional sub-project areas, new information and changed circumstances will be assessed, informal public engagement will occur, and additional required NEPA will be determined
 - Subsequent Record of Decision/Decision Notices would authorize implementation of additional sub-project areas where surveys have been completed
- They are utilizing an exhaustive data collection and analysis process, including integrated fire hazard and drought hazard assessments, that allows for well-informed and transparent decision-making.
- Finally, they are building a dynamic and responsive planning approach through a pre-emptive adaptive management framework.
- Steps in Developing the Restoration Plan:
 - 1. Identify and map strategic resources, areas, and assets (SARA)
 - 2. Engage partners to align SARAs with their Memorandum of Understanding

- 3. Determine the restorative return on investment
 - A risk assessment and opportunity assessment for each SARA was completed, and restorative value is equal to avoided loss + opportunity for enhancement.
- 4. Optimization- package the treatment areas for implementation
 - Using ForSys, a modeling platform was developed to analyze prioritization problems at multiple scales. The system simulates the implementation of specific priorities and examines the rate of achieving specific outcomes.

Hugh Safford, Regional Ecologist with the USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region (SoCal Montane Conservation Strategy)

- The goal of the SoCal Montane Conservation Strategy is to engage partners across the region in advancing the collective understanding of the vulnerabilities and challenges facing these forests and identify the opportunities and strategies for increasing forest resilience.
- The project is still in the planning and stakeholder engagement process.
- The project team will 1) develop a forest conservation strategy, 2) identify implementation actions, and 3) promote collaboration.
- Project challenges include rapidly intensifying stressors and disturbances, many with strong climate connections.
- Southern CA montane forests provide a number of important ecosystem services and cultural connections, but forest loss is being driven by tree mortality and stand-replacing wildfires which are being exacerbated by global climate change.
- Many areas in SoCal have reached 80-100+ years in time since the last fire, leading to overly dense forests, which are more susceptible to drought, disease, and insect mortality. Severe wildfires have negative implications for biodiversity and black oak is particularly vulnerable.
- In developing a conservation strategy, they hope to use science-based guidance on threats and desired conditions, obtain practitioner perspectives on overcoming barriers to implementation, develop goals and strategies to mitigate threats and vulnerabilities and overcome barriers to action, use an all-lands approach, create opportunity to develop partnerships and explore joint projects to enhance forest health and resilience, and promote partner and stakeholder engagement.
- They want to promote ongoing collaborative action and foster development of partnerships to improve forest resilience and to secure long-term solutions. This will involve community and practitioner engagement and tribal community involvement; whose ancestral lands cover the four forests in the project.

Carolyn Lott, Facilitator, Carlon Consulting and Kathryn Wilkinson, Forest Environmental Coordinator, USDA Forest Service Region 5 (SERAL project)

- YSS started as a USFS group in 2012, and turned into a collaborative group in 2014. They have a leadership team that rotates and facilitates the collaborative.
- YSS proposed a large-landscape plan several years ago out of concern that landscape treatments were too fragmented.
- YSS did early analysis of the landscape and shared values to the USFS, and they integrated those into the development of priorities for the project and made suggestions for rules that would guide activities associated with sensitive species.
- There is a Master Stewardship Agreement between the collaborative and USFS, with surveys managed by YSS and done by consultants.
- YSS helps USFS to take appropriate risks and work differently to get landscape work done, and new and exciting tools and science are being applied to the SERAL area. YSS also helped USFS avoid technical jargon in environmental documents for public review.
- SERAL fire management features:
 - Prioritized by POD mission weighted expected net value change
 - Highest priority PODS are where the first surveys/treatments are planned for

Kyle Rodgers, Collaborative Forestry Program Manager, Sierra Institute for Community and Environment (South Lassen Watershed Group)

- Large fires have occurred in the last 20 years to the south of the SLWG focal area.
- South Lassen Watershed Group is composed of 25 diverse stakeholders, and partners bring additive capacity to projects. The focus of the collaborative is restoration and economic development.
- The Robber's Creek project is a 6,000-acre combined forest health and meadow restoration project that is supported by CalFire funding, and WCB funding for implementation. SLWG is approaching these projects as integrated partnerships (rather than 3rd party NEPA), with both partners and agency staff working together.
- For initial grant funding, they retained receipts from implementation work to get further work done.
- SLWG is moving their focus to a larger landscape, with the West Lassen Headwaters project, which is 150,000 acres, to return fire to the landscape.
- For this project, they are bringing lessons from other landscape-scale approaches, and they are engaging the collaborative in defining resource-specific priorities, existing data and survey needs, and collaboratively developing existing and desired conditions.

Concluding Remarks

Jessica Morse, Deputy Secretary for Forest Resource Management, California Natural Resources Agency

- Jessica discussed the scale of investment and the availability of resources in the Governor's budget to promote and build up the work of collaboratives.
- In the budget, there is currently 1.2 billion for wildfire resilience this year, in addition to the suppression budget, which is up from 75 million last year for wildfire resilience.
- There will be investment across these fronts of fire resilience:
 - Restoring watersheds
 - Fuels Reduction
 - Community Intervention
 - Including defensible space and home hardening, while promoting work with fire safe councils
- There was an increase in grant resources (now 255 million in the forest health grant budget and 200 million in the fire prevention grant budget)
- There is increasing funding for local and state-owned land to make lands fire resilient, and they are hoping for larger, more robust projects as a result of more funding.
- They are trying to ground grant dollars in regional strategies, and they want to prioritize projects that have been identified within these strategies. They are also investing in the Regional Fire and Forest Capacity (RFFC) program.
- They are creating a new program to have directed grants just for Tribes, with the goal of giving Tribes more autonomy over grant dollars.
- They are also implementing permitting reform. The CalVTP program was rolled out, which is a 20-million-acre programmatic environmental impact review on non-federal, high-fire-risk land in the state. CEQA requirements, CDFW permits, and water board permits would all be fully integrated into an application to this program with no fee, as a way to speed up and increase efficiency of fuels reduction work.
- Finally, they have proposed to the legislature 7-year life expenditures on dollars, as opposed to traditional 3-5-year grants that require re-applications or extensions. 7-year life on dollars would allow larger grants for full projects and reduce the breaking up of projects into multiple phases. Through 7-year feedstock supply contracts, they hope to jump start woody feedstock businesses and feedstock supply aggregation. This would also allow for 7-year contracts for treatment processes, such as mastication, etc.