

# Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement (SCALE)

## Fall 2021 Meeting

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November 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Online

### Meeting Summary

Sierra Institute hosted its Fall Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement (SCALE) meeting over two days, on November 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021 virtually over Zoom. Jennifer Eberlien, Regional Forester for the Pacific Southwest Region, opened Day 1 with introductory comments. Steve Buckley, from the South Lassen Watershed Group, and Irvin Jim, Alpine County Supervisor, then provided reports and reflections on the impacts of the Dixie and Tamarack fires, respectively. Participants then moved into break out groups to discuss questions centered on aligning collaborative and State priorities. These discussions were prefaced with presentations from State representatives. Patrick Wright, Manager of the Governor's Forest Management Task Force, provided an informational overview of regional framework development, and the broader vision of the task force. Keali'i Bright, Department of Conservation, gave an overview of the Regional Fire and Forest Capacity (RFFC) program and guidelines. Finally, Erin Ernst, coordinator for the Tahoe Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI), provided background on the 10 Pillars of Resilience, a framework designed to provide guidance on measuring and tracking progress of collaborative forest restoration work. After a group report out and discussion after the break out rooms, Jonathan Kusel, Sierra Institute, and Jim Mayer, CalForward, provided closing remarks.

Day 2 opened with brief overview of topics and discussions covered in Day 1. This was followed by Jim Houtman, Butte County Fire Safe Council, who presented on the recovery process after the Camp Fire in 2014. Participants then went into a second break out session, this time focused on capacity needs of collaboratives, and sustained regional funding distribution. After a full group report out and discussion, the day wrapped with a panel featuring Patrick Wright, Keali'i Bright, John Amodio, and Jonathan Kusel regarding next steps and needed lines of work moving forward for SCALE.

### Day 1:

#### Introduction/Kick-Off

Jennifer Eberlien, Regional Forester, Pacific Southwest Region

- Jennifer oversees 18 National Forests and reflected on the past couple of fire seasons in California, funding for forest restoration, and next steps to increase the pace and scale of work. Shared stewardship is their mantra and is necessary to get the work done.
- Public and private lands are under threat. There is a lot of work needed that needs to be done in upkeep and maintaining our lands, but there are many compounding issues happening at once, including drought, wildfire, climate change, tree mortality, and more. The past two years were record shattering for California, with nearly 6 million acres burned. There are large areas that need restoration and reforestation, but there is also the need for constant maintenance and upkeep of landscapes. All of this has happened in the backdrop of a worldwide pandemic.
- The state of California has really stepped up in providing money, with nearly 1.5 billion dollars invested into fire and forestry. There is also potential for some significant investment from the federal government through annual appropriations bills, the bipartisan infrastructure bill, and more.
- Ultimately, we have never been more aligned. Values and priorities are coming together, and we need to emphasize outreach and building trust in partnerships. The Forest Service is challenged by a lack of personnel, and have lost 35% of their non-fire employees over the past 15 years.

## Dixie and Tamarack Fires: Impacts and Next Steps

### Steve Buckley, South Lassen Watershed Group: Dixie Fire

- Standing on top of the Lake Almanor overlook, horizon to horizon was burned by the Dixie Fire. The fire began on July 13<sup>th</sup>, and Lassen Volcanic National Park experienced impacts on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of August, after a 100,000-acre run. We are experiencing hotter and drier conditions, and are consistently seeing 100% flammability indices. There were massive impacts to collaborative partners. The Maidu Summit Consortium had just retrieved some of their traditional homelands, which completely burned over. The West Shore Project, which was an important project for the local community and was nearing a decision, also burned over. The Robbers Creek project also burned. For the Burney Hat Creek Collaborative, the Plum and Badger projects were also impacted. Private industry partners Sierra Pacific Industries and Collins Pine had substantial losses.
- We are seeing that we are not moving fast enough, but we are moving as fast as we can with current NEPA processes. The park is moving forward with existing plans to maintain forests with fire. Another lesson learned is that we need to harden communities, and that 100 ft of defensible space is not enough. We are experiencing fire behavior that we have never seen before, and this was the first time that a fire burned from one side of the Sierra to another. Some tools simply are not as effective as they used to be.
- The current challenge for the South Lassen Watershed Group is how to manage the green versus the black. Mill and Deer Creek have been identified as areas of concern as they are likely to transmit fire, and have not yet burned. We need to think about how to manage these lands with accelerated climate change. There were some areas in the

park that saw extremely beneficial fire, but there were also a lot of employees that lost homes.

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

- From his perspective as a Washoe tribal member, there is frustration at the approach of sitting back and watching when lightning strikes wilderness areas, which then reaches communities. There was a lot of culturally important land that burned, including traditional gathering sites for pine nuts. Pinyon trees in particular are very delicate, and if one were planted today, it would not bear fruit for another 30 years. Grandchildren of his are losing opportunities to do the same cultural activities that he had done.
- From an economic standpoint in Alpine County, the estimated economic impact is roughly 20-100K in losses. This may not sound like much, but there are few businesses there, and the impact is massive for a town of that size. The beauty of Alpine county is relied upon for revenue in the area.
- Ultimately, he stressed that our kids will inherit this mess, and we need to work together and move forward in making the situation better in any way that we can.

## Break-Out Sessions: Framework Development and Aligning State and Collaborative Priorities

Patrick Wright, Governor's Forest Management Task Force: Regional Frameworks and Broader Strategy of the Task Force

- The goal of the task force is to pull together agencies, build an action-oriented plan, and encourage the implementation of this plan. We need to align ourselves at the federal, state, local, and tribal levels.
- We are all over the map when it comes to data, regarding a wide variety of disciplines including wood utilization, reforestation, prescribed fire strategy, and workforce strategy. We need to pull agencies together so that we have a common data understanding.
- There is an upsurge in the need and use for regional frameworks. Every region is different, and we need to shift away from the current grant structure. We need to even the playing field, and make sure grants are going to the highest-risk areas, and not just locations with the highest-caliber collaboratives and organizations. We also need measures of success beyond acres treated, and they are trying to create more measures to use across the State.
- They are trying to move towards sustained funding at the regional level.

## Keali'i Bright, Department of Conservation: RFFC Program and Guidelines

- The RFFC (Regional Fire and Forest Capacity) Program is designed to empower regional leadership to meet statewide goals. We need to treat forest and fire resilience as a statewide infrastructure program. The lay of the land involves overlapping jurisdictions, policy priorities, and partners. The RFFC program built on early consensus around shared priorities. The objective is to build regional capacity to develop and implement equitable project pipelines that have broad regional support, with the deliverables of developing regional priority plans, project pipelines, and demonstration projects. There need to be these deliverables, as they are held accountable for the money that is given. The broader goal and bigger vision are for program regions to lead multi funding source watershed planning and implementation.
- The framework building blocks are:
  - 3-tier geographic structure (collaborative leadership, regional management, and multi-regional coordination)
  - Collaborative support
    - Planning guidance
    - Planning toolkits
    - Peer-to-peer reliance
    - Capacity for long-term durability
  - Outcomes management
    - Collaborative-led planning
    - Statewide data, assessments
    - Regional data, assessments
    - Shared priorities
    - Project readiness
    - Outcomes monitoring
- The regional framework is organized at 3-tiers:
  - Multi-region areas
  - RFFC regions
  - Collaboratives

## Erin Ernst, Tahoe Central Sierra Initiative: Presentation on Pillars of Resilience

- The Tahoe Central Sierra Initiative was formed in 2017 to address challenges at a landscape scale. The Pillars of Resilience were developed out of a need to track progress and communicate about resilience. There was no broad consensus amongst practitioners on desired conditions that included resilience, and TCSI wanted an evidence-based framework for defining and measuring forest resilience in the Sierra Nevada.
- The development process involved a 2018 comparative resilience workshop meant to:
  - Share analytical and modeling approaches to resilience
  - Build consensus around desired landscape outcomes
  - Identify consistent methods and metrics for assessing resilience

- The resulting 10 Pillars of Resilience were published in the [Framework for Resilience](#) report that provides a structure for assessing landscape conditions, setting objectives, designing projects, and measuring progress towards social-ecological resilience. The pillars are being used in variety of ways depending on preferences in different groups. They can be used to ask stakeholders to assign weights to them, or many other ways.

## Break Out Group Discussions Report Outs

- The pillars are meant as guideposts for groups, which are all at different phases of development. Measures of both collaborative and agency capacity should be considered, as they are essential to building durability and longevity to this type of work.
- Invasive species are often missing from discussions of biodiversity.
- For some groups, social and economic well-being is where the conversation starts. These are included in the pillars, but data availability in terms of monitoring and tracking these outcomes is not well-defined. There tends to be more capacity for ecological monitoring and data, and these often align better with what collaboratives are doing. Social and cultural indicators are less prevalent in collaboratives and there are not a lot of social science metrics in use.
- One group noted the importance of considering measures for environmental justice.
- Regarding capacity concerns, it was noted that for some there is a lack of local capacity or even contract worker availability. The spread of projects is slowed from implementation capacity and also the need for more specialists. Organizations need to be ensured work for a length of years, so that organizations can hire people with confidence and contribute to more of a durability in capacity. Ultimately, the FS can't elevate the amount of work that is needed due to low staffing. Tools like MSAs are needed to help partners take on some of the work.

## Closing Remarks

### Jonathan Kusel and Jim Mayer

- Jim posed the question of what the intention of work is after the conversation in these SCALE meetings. The goal is to use this as a beginning conversation with the State about what funding should look like, and create feedback loops between them and collaborative groups.
- At the regional and watershed level, the ball is in our court to use the pillars framework. SCALE can potentially share how various groups are adapting the pillars to their needs. Going forward, we'll need to continue sorting out how to fill in capacity needs and work with the State. We'll need to have ways to measure capacity as a prerequisite to other measurements like forest resilience.

Day 2:

## Recovery After Severe Wildfire

Jim Houtman, Butte County Fire Safe Council

- Prior to the Camp Fire, the Butte County Fire Safe Council received 3 CCI grants. Of a staff of 5 people, 4 ended up losing their homes.
- There were several wins- fuel reduction work through the Paradise property association helped to contain the fire and keep it out of their drinking water lake. Where nothing was done, there was an estimated 80% mortality of trees, but where there was thinning, there was an estimated 80% survivability.
- Once the Camp Fire came through, they hired more people and did scope changes to grants, and developed a forest management plan.
- They work with many partners, and many organizations came together to help them. An early meeting focused on biomass utilization and what to do with all of the trees that needed to be removed. At the time, there was a market for timber, but this is no longer the case. They worked with CalOES and FEMA, and the town is now working on category 4 trees, having worked through 1-3.
- Long-term recovery groups formed, and they became a clearinghouse. The Camp Fire collaborative includes many groups, such as NGOs, government organizations, churches, and social workers.
- When the Bear Fire happened, they did a scope change for all of their grants. They did everything from tree removal, erosion control, and working on private roads that FEMA and CalOES are not going to do.
- They are working on removing trees around private landowners, but it is a heavy lift to find the right grants and funding to help people. Ultimately, though, community connections are everything.
- The Fire Safe Council in Concow got grants to provide vouchers for food, water, propane filling, tree removal, and more.
- Historic events create historic opportunities. In these types of meetings, we can talk about how we can learn from each other. We are doing things that have never been done before, and there is no right way to do it.

## Break Out Sessions: Direct Funding Through Block Grants and Sustained Regional Funding - how it might work

John Amodio, Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions: Discussion of Challenges and Opportunities for Advancing the Conversation with our State and federal partners

- Policies from decades ago are not made for the conditions that we have today. There is a lack of adequate sustained funding. Collaboratives provide a social license to take action. Staff limitations at the State and federal level mean that collaboratives are key. Going forward, government and collaborative groups agree, but need to sort out how to get the work done. State and federal partners need to be involved at every level of collaboration, which has been done with the YSS collaborative group. There are many shovel-ready projects awaiting funding. Cobbling together adequate funding is currently inefficient and deters the private sector from investing in related businesses. We need a new sustained funding approach, and in the transition, there needs to be bundling of existing funding programs.

### Patrick Wright, Governor's Forest Management Task Force: Providing Sustained Regional Funding

- There is pressure from the state to spend money now on shovel-ready projects, but also create mechanisms for sustained funding. Tying projects to specific state mandates will help groups to stay in line for money. There is a historic lack of trust for grant programs of state agencies to distribute money regionally. There has been a lot of money approved for planning, recognizing the need to invest in regional capacity. He is interested in the group's thoughts to help regional collaboratives be in a position to spend sustained funding, not that this is necessarily promised.

### Break Out Group Discussion Report Outs

- Workforce development and outlets for woody biomass are often repeated as major barriers. For workforce needs specifically, there needs to be more seasonal housing. Even if groups are able to hire, there is often no place for people to live.
- There is a capacity need around partnerships themselves- to be able to support partners and create agreements.
- There needs to be money for post fire support, and capacity building for sustained management of WUI areas.
- Most groups have done a capacity needs assessment. There needs to be funding to facilitate the collaborative, money to implement, and capacity to process woody materials.
- Raising match dollars and having a commensurate amount of match to keep competitive is a capacity limitation.
- There has to be a goal, perhaps an acreage goal, to know what kind of capacity is needed to meet that goal.
- We need to address burnout needs, and not rely on volunteers.
- Another group noted highlighted the need for people trained in GIS, turnover in leadership, labor resource needs for the kinds of contracts/parcel sizes that

collaboratives identify, raising the next generation of foresters and figuring out how to entice students to go into a career that may not ensure long-term security, and looking into potential for inter-agency agreement to share personnel.

- Many organizations and tribes have people doing such a broad range of tasks that they don't have admin or HR focused people to think beyond the current operating scope. The long-term operating costs of organizations are underestimated.
- There could be a framework for what it takes to "level up." What does a collaborative have to have in terms of capacity to be "reliable" to the State?
  - Possible components include a facilitator, a watershed coordinator, x number of members, etc. The question needs to be answered: What are the capacity needs from the State perspective, and what constitutes sufficient capacity?
- For areas with little or no collaborative capacity, we should be looking to community groups that may not yet focus on forestry and fire, and other organizations such as SNC/RCRC. There are workforce development programs that employ local groups and then expand where there are existing collaboratives and stakeholder stipends to allow people to become involved in collaborative work.

## Next Steps for SCALE and Lines of Work Moving Forward

Jonathan Kusel, Sierra Institute, Patrick Wright, Governor's Forest Management Task Force, Keali'i Bright, Department of Conservation, and John Amodio, Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions

- These meetings have reaffirmed that there is better alignment on a vision moving forward than ever before. The caveat is a lack of capacity, and sustained funding would be the "magic bullet." In a world without sustained funding, though, the best bet is developing a framework to avoid siloes and access multiple state funding sources.
- The question around the RFFC program is how best to allocate intention and resources to understand where collaboratives are in terms of things that they can report to the legislature, but also support collaborative work. Groups are struggling with burnout and distraction, and we need to focus on the durability issue to keep people at the table through building institutionalized expectations.
- The State needs to work with collaboratives to bundle funding sources, as seeking this funding is a large contributor to burnout. The RFFC program can be a pilot in aligning funding, but in defense of agencies, the legislation driving these programs often doesn't allow for multi-benefit funding to collaborative groups.
- Going forward, there needs to be advocacy to the legislature. Agencies themselves are not well positioned to lobby politicians, as they are more likely to listen to constituents than to state agencies. SCALE stakeholders can serve as an informational resource not only to the State, but also to the legislature in developing recommendations and communicating barriers. This voice needs to be better articulated in Sacramento. Connecting groups to their local legislators would be a good start, and county

supervisors in particular are a good liaison. Potential partner organizations such as RCRC are also an excellent lobbying resource.

- Ultimately, there is a lot of goodwill right now, but this doesn't last long. We need to take the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of programs like RFFC to the legislature, and that means effectively rolling up outcomes.