

**Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI)
Regional Coordinating Council Meeting Minutes
June 22, 2011
The Ridge
2020 Golf Course Road
Auburn, CA 95602**

Present:

SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council Members:

Dave Bischel – California Forestry Association
Kathy Hardy – Bureau of Land Management
Terry Davis – Sierra Club, Mother Lode Chapter
Frank Stewart – California Association of Fire Safe Councils
Eric Holst – Environmental Defense Fund
Steve Brink – California Forestry Association
Warren Alford – Sierra Forest Legacy
Valerie Klinefelter – California Association of Resource Conservation and Development
Districts
Steve Wilensky – Calaveras County Supervisor (Co-Chair)
Bob Kirkwood – Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Governing Board Liaison
Craig Thomas – Sierra Forest Legacy
Bill Wickman – Sustainable Forest Action Coalition
Mike Chapel – U.S. Forest Service
Bill Nunes – (Co-Chair) Sierra County Supervisor/Sierra Nevada Conservancy
Governing Board Liaison
Mike DeBonis – Forest Guild
Kim Carr – Sierra Nevada Conservancy

By phone:

Jonathan Kusel – Sierra Institute for Community and Environment
Jay Francis – Collins Pine Co.
Patricia Megason – Regional Coalition of Rural Counties

Facilitator:

Susie Kocher – UC Extension

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Staff and Consultants:

Mark Stanley
Brittany Juergenson
Elissa Brown
Anne Brice
Mandy Vance
Bob Kingman

Public Attendees:

David Edelson – The Nature Conservancy

I. **Recap of decisions made during March meeting**

- a. *Collaborative Consensus Based Process* – The Coordinating Council approved a revised version of the process that allows a Coordinating Council member to abstain from a consensus decision without prejudice, which will not prevent the Coordinating Council from moving forward with a position or action.
- b. *Reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Funding* – The Coordinating Council endorsed the reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Act in concept and directed that a letter stating this should be drafted and circulated. They would also like to point out that the funding from this act is important to local efforts, including Fire Safe Councils.

Action Item: Kim Carr will assign staff to draft a revised letter and circulate it to the Coordinating Council for comments. Patricia Megason will provide some language and suggestions of how to circulate it. The Coordinating Council would like the letter to remain general since there is no reauthorization bill introduced as yet, though there is funding in the president's budget. **The Coordinating Council agreed to move forward with consensus and one abstention.**

II. **Policy Working Group Report Out**

- a. *Support for Reauthorization of the Stewardship Contracting Authority*

Mike DeBonis gave an update on the Policy Committee's examination of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) staff policy paper regarding the reauthorization of stewardship contracting. There was discussion of this in the last meeting but no specific direction, and the Policy Committee was charged with gathering additional information. In Washington, DC there is broad support for stewardship contracting in the administration, among land managers and stakeholder groups. There are two possible paths to reauthorization. One is to reauthorize the authority in its current form before it expires in 2013. The other is to consider substantive changes, including extending the contracting authority to 20 years, and allowing 25% of retained receipts to go back to counties. The policy group should be prepared to both address actual bills, and address administrative regulations related to the program – how can it be applied in a meaningful way, how can it be better implemented.

The Coordinating Council discussed the issue of using revenues to do necessary National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) work. This would be a change in the current policy. Consideration should be given to the loss of funding for actual implementation, particularly for difficult treatment areas. Are NEPA dollars easier to get than implementation funds? It was suggested that there should at least be the flexibility to use the funds for NEPA if it is needed.

Another issue was bonding. When the Forest Service issues a Stewardship Contract to a selected bidder, the Forest Service has to set aside appropriated dollars as a performance bond. This is called a 'cancellation ceiling', and can result in large financial impacts. These only apply to the 'service' portion of the contract, so this has not been considered an area where substantive change is needed. However, this is still a chunk of money, even if it only applies to service items. The Department of Defense waived this requirement by saying that they were a federal agency and didn't need to bond themselves. Bonding is a huge issue for the Forest Service

Action item: The Policy committee needs to do some work to figure out what the next steps are. It was requested that this be done before the next meeting and whatever the Policy Committee develops be e-mailed to the Coordinating Council so they can take a vote at the next meeting. It was also suggested that the policy committee examine alternatives to the current Forest Services bonding requirements.

III. Forest Service Leadership Intent

a. *The Coordinating Council's support for the Leadership Intent document and interest in engaging with Forest Service*

There is a lot going on in Region 5, including the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration. Much of this document is consistent with SNFCI – including 'triple bottom line' and 'all lands' approaches. There are still barriers and other issues to be put together. How does the SNFCI Coordinating Committee relate to this process? It is the goal of this group to further it as expeditiously as possible.

b. *Overview of Leadership Intent, Current Activities and Next Steps/Pace and Scale (Chris Nota and Bruce Goines, USFS)*

Chris Nota provided an overview of the Leadership Intent status and other activities. The Forest Service is just getting started on this. They worked for a year on the Leadership Intent and it's still a work in progress. They think it's good for now, though they may revisit it in a year or so. Now they want to focus on implementation. From this point forward, all the work the Forest Service does is going to be focused on restoration, and they need to pick up the pace and scale of this restoration work. Also, their approach needs to be different than how they've done things in the past. Their budget won't support increased pace and scale. They need to find partners.

How is the Intent being implemented? They've been spending time communicating with employees to help them understand the importance of this. They still have a ways to go. Also, they need to do more integrated restoration work. Budget instructions have been sent out about integrating parts of the budget so they integrate with this work – road work, meadow work. In addition

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to the Leadership Intent, there is the five-year vegetation plan, the priority watershed work – a lot of things are happening at once and they are all related.

The Forest Service is very aware of where there are collaboratives on the ground. That helps them focus their work when looking at how they will get work done, they note the major components and ask ‘who cares’ about this area, and ‘what work can we do together in this area’. Some of the components were forest health, water, getting kids outdoors, etc. For the issue of ‘getting urban kids outdoors’, there is a large corporation that is investing in a program that gets kids jobs out in the forest. For the water issue, they have started talking with utility companies. They’ve tried to start with watersheds where there is a direct connection with water utilities and the forests and where there is already collaborative work being done. They are not there yet but have started the relationship.

Biomass is another area where the Forest Service is putting a lot of energy. If they can make the biomass puzzle work, they can get a lot more work done on the ground. They have been engaged with the Biomass Working Group and started discussions with the Public Utility Commissions about how biomass is priced. This is the type of activity that might allow them to pick up the pace and scale of work.

Bruce Goines gave portions of one of Malcolm North’s presentations on the topic of pace and scale: Where are we now, what does it mean to us all, and what are the next steps. The trend is that California is experiencing larger and more severe wildfires. When they look at pace and scale of fuel work, they discovered that current pace and scale are infinitesimal on the landscape. At this rate, in 34 years the system would become unraveled and we would experience more loss on the forests than we would growth. Carbon translates to air quality, water quality, habitat loss, and loss of use. Business as usual is not making the cut.

What is a resilient forest landscape? We all agree that fuel hazard reduction is effective. There are things we can do on the landscape to prevent large, severe fires. The problem is pace and scale. There are over 10 million acres that are backlogged that needs to be impacted in the Sierra forest. What we are treating is about 62 thousand acres per year. The pace and scale is not sufficient. Malcolm put forth that we should be looking at firesheds and is treating firesheds at the landscape level that has an impact. There is not enough money to do what we’re doing the way that we’re doing it. We have to get at a much bigger, larger scale. The other important point is collaboration. Working with potential investment in upper watersheds is going to take collaboration. There are approaches to restoration that can be applied. There must be some way of taking economic value to fund the restoration treatments. If we’re going to increase the pace and scale of treatments we have to be

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concerned with infrastructure (mills, biomass plants, etc.). That will require a stable supply of materials.

Long term stewardship contracts are one of the ways we have to move forward. It's one of the best models. There has to be investment in restoration by the regions. These are integral. You can't do this without the collaborative process in place with agreement on what needs to be done, where and when.

Goines commented that North's research shows it is clear that we have to dramatically increase the use of fire. If we deny fire into this mountain range, we won't get there. We need to get the stands to a condition where fire can be used to maintain them. If we're not doing 250,000 acres, we're not going to get there. We have to switch to a large landscape approach. This will increase as people get their hands around the issues. As long as we keep the institutional model of separate districts we won't have the flexibility to move people around, use the resources. We've made some progress in prioritizing areas. No-one wanted the prioritization previously because it creates 'haves and have-nots', but we've started to shift to see that this is necessary. The watershed conditions framework has to be in alignment with some of the collaborative work that's out there. That's where we're going to break out, where we have the collaboration.

There was a discussion whether to focus the larger treatment scales where there are already assets (infrastructure). The members of this group have different criteria, a lot of different views depending on where they come from. This would be helpful to share with the Forest Services. How we balance that Sierra-wide in the interest of the whole that is an important discussion. You also have to look at this historically. How and where you scale up should be strategically and realistically valued and there are many different criteria to apply.

The research community and stakeholders need to come together (example – Fisher habitat). We're moving along but it is rough. We're either going to come out with an agreement on how to move forward or we're going to crash and burn. We need the region's leadership and direction.

Regarding priority for the Forest Service to enter into contracts with communities (i.e., Weaverville community forest) - this is a model that the Regional Forester says we should be looking at. He put it on the table to be considered and recently asked some County Supervisors to look at opportunities in their areas. The RC&D and RCDs are very involved in that process.

The Forest Plan is terribly out of date. We have to have a whole new approach and we have to have it in the next 2 years. You cannot get to 500,000 acres/year without doing that work up front. Some of these forests are within 4

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years of doing first pass on the non-sensitive areas and without addressing the sensitive issues with partners they will not be able to treat additional acres. It was recommended that the Forest Service and Coordinating Council work together to systematically identify the barriers to ramping up the pace and scale – lack of social license, Forest Plan is out of date, etc. Identify strategies this group can work on to meet these barriers.

The Coordinating Council discussed how it wants to be involved in furthering implementation. What are the next steps and who will take them? Discussion included the following points:

- Collaboration is the lynch pin to moving forward and areas with strong collaboratives will be a target for work.
- If we're going to move the direction of increasing pace and scale we have to improve science.
- We have to prioritize areas to target for treatment.
- Priorities might be based on the values at risk, the level of involvement, the biomass capacity in the area, assets (social capital, infrastructure), and biomass type.
- Wildlife has to be incorporated (need a Pacific Fisher General Technical Report - GTR).
- Look at models (Weaverville Community Forest Model).
- A role of the SNC and the Coordinating Council is to educate State politicians and communities about the importance of the Sierra.
- Have to reach agreement on how to reach difficult (ecologically sensitive) areas.
- Do an analysis of the barriers to moving forward. Scaling up NEPA might be part of it. Improving economics might be part of this. What is keeping the agencies from increasing the pace and scale of treatment. The group can then address the problems identified.

We have a good start but there are a lot more barriers and criteria that need to be laid out. A coordinating group may help set this up. This group is more rounded – we have a lot of specific areas of concern. The Forest Service has been great on the philosophical level, but how does this go on the ground? We can use this forum to put specifics together to make this real. There is an opportunity here to make this initiative real on the ground, both by removing barriers, increasing interagency activities (all lands), and overcoming barriers to communication among and within agencies. These are things that need to be tied into local place-based processes. Politics should also be part of the thinking. We need a good set of working groups to work on these issues (CEQA/NEPA, Policy Committee, etc.).

Some areas of the Leadership Intent, such as meadow restoration, are well underway. They have developed partnerships and the funding and science is

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good. It doesn't need help from this group. Roads are another area with established support. The challenging area is increasing the pace and scale of in-forest fuels work. This is the area we need to focus on with this group. It would be valuable to hear what this group thinks is a priority.

Recommendations have come out today that we are already looking at— i.e., use of fire, larger projects in priority areas, structuring process, increasing pace and scale. Specific ideas would be helpful. The Forest Service intends to come forward with ideas, but this is a wonderful group to work on this independently.

It was suggested that we need to demonstrate that we can do a massive scale project in California. We need to convince decision-makers that massive scale projects are doable. Getting something like this going in the next year would be a huge priority. We need a showpiece. We know we need to do this where there is a collaborative process and existing infrastructure.

It was suggested that members of the Coordinating Council start to attend Forest Service Planning meetings. This would increase the capacity of the Forest Service staff to work with collaboratives. This is what is needed to get the landscape-level projects moving down the road. Forest Service representatives committed to discussing the Coordinating Council's involvement with their management.

The GTR 220 has allowed us to refocus and reengage with conversations. A fire GTR (accumulation of knowledge agreed upon by most people in the hot-button areas) would be an underpinning for us all to get started. There is also a need for the Coordinating Council to come up with a shared vision to be shared with the agency.

Action items:

- **The Coordinating Council Working Group will work hand in hand with Forest Service to support implementation of the Leadership Intent with a focus on increasing the pace and scale of forest treatment (Volunteers: Craig Thomas, Steve Brink, Frank Stewart, David Edelson, Steve Wilensky, Kim Carr)**
- **Full Coordinating Council will act in an advisory role to develop a shared vision (not as detailed) and possibly take more general concepts and articulate them.**
- **The SNC will provide a framework with the meeting notes and request additional comments from the Coordinating Council regarding issues/barriers/opportunities for the Forest Service to consider when implementing the Leadership Intent. Timeframe: Circulate the framework and request comments (bullet points) by end of July. The Coordinating Council may review this and consider taking action during the next Coordinating Council meeting.**

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The Coordinating Council was briefed on the following four issues to provide an update of project activities occurring that serve as examples and models for the Leadership Intent implementation plan.

d. *Triple Bottom Line (Buena Vista agreement, local contractors cooperative, job training and workforce development)*

Steve Wilensky presented about one specific thing which happened since the Coordinating Council last met that shows the effects of the triple bottom line. The Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG) focuses in an area where the infrastructure has collapsed – they had 22 mills and now have none. There is also an excess of fuel built up in the forests. They have a very strong environmental component in the ACCG collaborative. In a practical way, the triple bottom line talks about the need for all three aspects on the ground (environment, economy and community) but doesn't always include benefiting local communities. But something happened recently which did have direct community benefit. The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) filed a lawsuit that stopped the conversion of the Buena Vista plant from burning lignite for energy to burning biomass. The environmental representatives within the collaborative became a bridge to the CBD by inviting them to come up to the community to take another look at the real impact on the local forest. At the same time the group of local contractors got involved. As a result, the lawsuit has been settled and withdrawn. In its place is a forest practices agreement. The social agencies that are part of ACCG are all in the process of developing, recruiting, and training the workforce that is now being hired at the biomass plant. Part of the outcome is a triple bottom line community review committee with representatives from the environmental community, industry representatives and the agencies that review the fuel work. If it hadn't been for all three pieces that were place-based, this project would have been used to try to stop biomass plants by proving that they are not carbon neutral. But when the opponents took a look on the ground, the global issues were over-ruled by the local place-based strategies. So now there are 36 new jobs being filled. The plant will go into operation in the next few months.

e. *All lands (private/public land owner involvement)*

Jonathan Kusel discussed an example in the Burney/Hat Creek forest collaborative area. Private land owners and businesses have come together to explore ways to bridge timber harvest plans and CEQA responsibilities across ownership. The Forest Service is interested in exploring ways to get to the 'all lands' component of CEQA and NEPA. There is a real commitment to focus not only on all lands but also triple bottom line, making sure that these benefits reach communities where poverty is high and getting worse. Also, ACCG and Burney/Hat Creek have gotten together to share strategies.

f. *Long-term funding (ecosystem services)*

Kim Carr discussed ecosystem services as a way to increase resources to restore our headwaters in a time of declining funding. We're looking at ways to

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put value on numerous benefits of healthy forests/watersheds. A partnership was established a year ago to try to get these concepts on the ground. This partnership includes the Nature Conservancy, Sustainable Conservation, Environmental Defense Fund, SNC and others. This group is looking to establish the value of ecosystem services on a watershed scale to identify new funds for restoration. They are working in the Mokelumne watershed where most of the water goes to one utility in the Bay Area. They are looking to establish metrics so they can quantify the benefits. To establish agreements and contracts, you need the metrics. This group is building on the great collaborative work already occurring in the watershed, both with the ACCG and the lower watershed collaborative. One project component is to establish protocols. One approach is to consider how the water beneficiaries can avoid costs such as the impacts of catastrophic wildfire by investing in fuels reduction in the headwaters to prevent fire.

Mike Chapel stated that California is now considering alternatives to funding water management programs, which have traditionally been through bonds. The new thing being considered is a fee that is given to all water users in California. The initial measures have stalled but the reports given to the State over the last few years heavily advise that voter-approved bonds are not the way to fund water management. They are looking at a distributed fee that all would share.

g. Biomass Guidelines

Mike Debonis discussed the potential of biomass utilization supporting the economic component of the bottom line. There are concerns about the sustainability of removing biomass. The Forest Guild initiated a process looking at harvesting guidelines for removing wood for economic purposes.

They started a 21 member committee to develop these guidelines, which were meant to supplement best management practices already in existence. The biomass retention and harvesting guidelines can fit into the existing BMPs. These have been out for more than a year in the northeast, and they are in the process of developing them in the southeast. What makes them useful here is that they use the best science in developing the guidelines but they also recognize that science may not always exist so they use folks who have on-the-ground experience. These have been integrated into some state processes. There are some place-based collaboratives which have questioned aspects of the guidelines. They are a work in process. Guidelines should be developed specifically for the Sierra Region. This is a model that could be used for our work here.

IV. **Local Forest Collaborative Working Group report out**

a. *Need for a CEQA/NEPA working group to address legislation and site specific efforts*

Frank Stewart stated that the one thing essential to address is CEQA for non-commercial projects. There is a new CEQA process being promulgated by CalFire. Noncommercial projects on private land can possibly come under this. This would save a lot of money. The NEPA is also an issue – we need a process that streamlines the NEPA reviews. HR 1485 is looking at this.

Discussion: As we look at this in our area, one of the big logjams is there is nobody staffing this stuff. If you're trying to plan at an all lands scale and the NEPA teams are only within these separate institutions (e.g., individual Forests, individual Forest Districts), how do you get an all lands approach? We need to challenge our institutional partners to merge efforts and create collaborative NEPA teams. The innovations up in Burney/Hat Creek are a start of this process. This is another opportunity that the long-term Stewardship contracts would provide.

Up in eastern Oregon there is a group called Blue Mountain Forest Initiative. This is a 3-year old collaboration that was started when an environmental litigator closed down several logging operations. They were working on coming to an agreement when there was a big, destructive fire. In 70 days they worked through a negative declaration allowing them to harvest downed trees. This was enough to save the last mill. They are following up to try to get a programmatic EIR for fire salvage. It was suggested that the SNC makes a grant to an organization to develop CEQA/NEPA for post-fire salvage.

From the federal side, there are things that could be helpful. There may be templates. But it probably isn't the case that you can do the site-specific level of NEPA ahead of time. However, there are joint NEPA/CEQA documents out there, and also joint NEPA documents with several federal agencies. When people are cut out or not included in collaboratives, NEPA is used to express concerns. There has been discussion about building a more comprehensive knowledge base (GTR, etc.) to help inform NEPA analysis to get larger scale work done. There are many things that we could do in the NEPA process to help to facilitate the timeframes. But if the objective is to escape rigorous review, that may backfire.

The more we focus on collaborative learning and development with stakeholders; we'll see pace and scale change. As we go to larger scale, the trust-building is critical, but so is the monitoring. The NEPA sets forth a course of action but we also need a set of principles that will let us move forward. This is one of the things that have taken place in the Burney/Hat Creek area. It won't happen overnight but it has happened quite quickly. It would be valuable to have some templates on how to move this forward.

A database of documents could be created that could help develop templates. There is already a database called 'CEQA net'. Those types of applications are available.

There is also an issue of those projects that require both CEQA and NEPA. The Forest Service has a group of experts that will be getting together talking about how to put documents together that meet the requirements of both laws.

b. G4 biomass utilization (CEC funded) project in Placer County

Brett Storey with Placer County discussed a grant from the California Energy Commission that is focused on Placer County development of a small scale biomass plant. G4 insights is the developer, TSS is a partner. They are working on a project converting biomass into CNG fuel. They are looking at building bench test units, and will be testing it in the Tahoe National Forest. They'll send the material to British Columbia where it will be turned into fuel, and sent back. They'll test the fuel in the car to see how it performs. The next test would be to build a unit on the trailer, ship it down to Placer County, converting biomass into CNG fuel. They are also looking at Butte County and Mendocino County. Placer County signed a master stewardship agreement with Tahoe National Forest.

V. Coordination to compile data, conduct assessments, identify pilot projects and evaluate policy Tabled

This may be addressed in the next meeting agenda. People can e-mail Kim what projects they are involved with. Kim will summarize and report at the next meeting.

VI. Debrief on March Sierra Cascade Dialog and the April Fire Conference Tabled

VII. Upcoming Meetings:

- October 26, 2011 (Confirmed)
- January, April, July and October 2012 (Suggested)