MEETING SUMMARY | Dinkey Collaborative Full Group

November 20, 2014

Dinkey Landscape Restoration Project, Sierra National Forest

Meeting Synopsis

At its November 20, meeting, the Dinkey Collaborative reviewed and commented on each of the elements of the preliminary Proposed Action for the Exchequer Project. This included the project-specific Forest Plan amendment, vegetation treatments, fuels reduction treatments, and watershed and riparian treatments. As part of this last topic, members discussed the idea of restoring or improving existing roads and unauthorized routes. Following lunch, Collaborative members received updates on the group's ongoing activities, including project implementation activities, insect-related mortality, the hiring of a new Deputy District Ranger, the development of socioeconomic monitoring questions and indicators, and the project budget. Finally, the Collaborative welcomed experts from the University of Washington, who presented the latest LiDAR imaging products and discussed their application to Exchequer and Dinkey Landscape planning. The full Collaborative will meet again on January 15, from 10 am to approximately 4 pm, at the Sierra National Forest Supervisor's Office, 1600 Tollhouse Road, in Clovis.

Contents

Meeting Synopsis 1
Action Items and Agreements 2
1. Welcome and Introductions 2
2. Interested Party Comment Period 3
3. Review of Preliminary Proposed Action 3
Purpose and Need 3
Project-Specific Forest Plan Amendment 3
Vegetation Treatments 3
Vegetation Treatments Associated with Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat 4
Fuels Reduction Treatments 4
Watershed and Riparian Restoration Treatments/ Improve Unauthorized Routes into Roads 4
4. Ongoing Activities 6
Project Updates 6
Bug-Kill Update 6
Deputy District Ranger Hiring 6
Socioeconomic Assessment 6
Monitoring Report to Congress 7
Regional, Forest and DLRP Budget Update 7
5. LiDAR Applications to the DLRP 8
6. Closing Remarks 9
7. Attendees 9

This meeting summary paraphrases individual comments and suggestions from Dinkey Collaborative members. Statements do not indicate consensus of the group unless they are preceded by the words, "AGREEMENT:".

All materials are available to members on DataBasin.org, and general information is available on the Dinkey Collaborative website, www.fs.usda.gov/goto/sierra/dinkeycollaborative For *questions please contact the facilitator, Mr. Dorian Fougères, at dfougeres@ccp.csus.edu or (916) 531-3835.*

Action Items and Agreements

1. **ID Team** to craft the language for the description section of the Proposed Action using Mr. Mark Smith's draft language.
2. **CCP** to redistribute Mr. Smith's draft language for the Purpose and Need to ID Team.
3. **CCP** to redistribute the landscape assessment final documents to ID Team.
4. **Facilitator** to resend the List of Proposed Action Elements to Ms. Nickerson, Ms. Locke, and Ms. Sorini-Wilson.
5. **All Members** to send additional comments on the preliminary Proposed Action by COB Friday, December 5th to Ms. Nickerson at jnickerson@fs.fed.us.
6. **All Members** to send feedback on utilizing CFLR money to hire a socioeconomic monitoring consultant to Mr. Van Velsor by COB Friday December 5th.
7. **CCP** to distribute the short and long versions of the Monitoring Report to Congress for member reference.
8. **Ms. Pam Flick and Ms. Sorini-Wilson** to review the volunteer accounting form for use and applicability as matching funds.
9. **Ms. Sorini-Wilson** and **Facilitator** to verify funding for facilitation.
10. **Mr. Meyers** to send Mr. Churchill and Mr. Kane the Natural Range of Variability documents from the Region 5 Forest Assessment.
11. **CCP** to send Mr. Churchill and Mr. Kane the reference conditions and indicators spreadsheets.
12. **CCP** to distribute all the November 20 presentations and recreational maps for member reference.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Kim Sorini-Wilson, Acting Deputy District Ranger, represented the Forest Service and welcomed members and guests to the full Dinkey Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) meeting. The facilitator conducted introductions, and reviewed the agenda items and ground rules.

2. Interested Party Comment Period

There were no public comments at this time.

3. Review of Preliminary Proposed Action

Ms. Sorini-Wilson and Ms. Jody Nickerson, NEPA Planner and Exchequer Project Lead, presented the elements of the preliminary Proposed Action and discussed the highlights of the joint ID team and Landscape Planning Work Group (LPWG) meetings and field visits.

Discussion followed, with the main topic being how staff were balancing the risk of fire with wildlife protection:

- In the denser patches of forests there is the potential for high severity fire to kill California Spotted Owls (CSO), similar results were found in the Rim Fire.
- In some cases buffer areas surrounding the dense patches are not enough to stop the spread of fire.
- Members recommended scientist Jerry Vernor's idea of systematically testing treatments on pairs of CSO Protected Activity Centers (PACs), to determine what level of disturbance they can tolerate.
- They also suggested collaborating with the Pacific Southwest Research Station (PSW) to balance wildlife protection and fire risk in and around PACs.

The facilitator invited members to provide feedback on the preliminary Proposed Action. Members offered the following suggestions for each section of the document.

Purpose and Need

- Add language around forest health based on species basal area (BA) trees per acre.
- Add more detail regarding the level of owl activity in Exchequer. It was said to be "owl world" but the information in the section does not reflect the emphasis on owl and fisher habitat.

Project-Specific Forest Plan Amendment

- Clarify that the eastern border of Exchequer is an area of only managed wildfire (i.e., a lightning strike would be allowed to burn in a controlled setting to promote a fire adapted landscape)
- Make maps more consistent with treatments, including the eastern border.

Vegetation Treatments

- (Best if incorporated into wildlife section) Members asked if the canopy cover was historically as high as 50%, if not, how was that number determined.
    - It was set as a threshold for habitat; it was not necessarily the historical forest structure.
- Clarify restoration and the intent to both return and limit fire.

- Add more detail around increasing forest resiliency to climate change and wildfire, while creating quality habitat.
- Emphasize the focus on the entire ecosystem, with multiple resources, not just one or two species.

Vegetation Treatments Associated with Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat

- Members of the LPWG conducted the landscape assessment, which identified Exchequer as the highest rated project. The description section should lead with this information.
- Members agreed that the treatments were consistent with solving the issues, but noted that the ties to the landscape indicators were missing.
- **Action item: ID Team** to craft the language for the description section of the Proposed Action using Mr. Mark Smith's draft language.
- **Action item: CCP** to redistribute Mr. Smith's draft language for the Purpose and Need.
- **Action item: CCP** to redistribute the landscape assessment final documents.

Fuels Reduction Treatments

- Provide a historical reference for fire return intervals.
- There is some level of concern around burning in meadows. It has been listed as an action item to utilize fire in meadows with regards to minimizing species impacts by using best management practices (BMPs).
- Members asked if there are areas without CSO and fisher.
    - There are areas where CSO and fisher are not active, but most are rock.
    - Members suggested increasing treatment intensities in the areas with limited to no restrictions.
    - Ms. Sorini-Wilson noted that the Forest has plans to extend treatments into Home Range Core Areas (HRCAs) in addition to the less restrictive areas. The Landscape Planning Work Group is working to determine what if any level of treatment might be appropriate in the HRCAs.
    - It is difficult to achieve desired results with only one entry most treatments require repeated entries.

Watershed and Riparian Restoration Treatments/ Improve Unauthorized Routes into Roads

As part of the presentation of the preliminary Proposed action, one Collaborative member reviewed the routes that he believed could be either restored to natural conditions or improved for recreational use. He emphasized the socioeconomic importance and benefits of public recreation on the forest, since logging was no longer the primary industry on the Forest. He noted that increasing public access on the forest would improve public perception of the Collaborative.

Discussion followed:

- Another member expressed concern for the ecological soundness of creating new roads from unauthorized routes, suggested that this proposal was not consistent with the goals of the Collaborative as written in its Charter, and noted that the creation of new roads contravenes the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) legislation.
    - The member also suggested it would be inappropriate to create new roads without the Forest first completing Subpart A of the Travel Management process (administration of the Forest Transportation System, including funding ongoing maintenance). Current information suggested that the Forest could not pay for its existing roads, so creating additional roads would increase the unmet financial burden.
    - The member suggested restoring the unauthorized routes back to natural conditions rather than turning them into roads, and maintaining the existing routes considered valuable to recreation.
- Forest staff noted that the Proposed Action was meant to conceptually continue Subpart B of Travel Management (designation of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use). Given resource, staff, and time limitations, Travel Management Subpart B was only able to analyze 10 to 20 percent of the unauthorized routes.
- The District Ranger clarified that the Forest pays the cost of project planning, while CFLR funds are used for implementation. Utilizing CFLR funds as a part of the planning process had not yet been considered.
- A member suggested that the unauthorized routes were not "new roads," but rather simple redefined the use of existing roads.
- A member noted that unmanaged roads can cause negative environmental impacts if they are not monitored and maintained.
- A member suggested that the Collaborative should consider public perception and support of its efforts. The public is often confused and dissatisfied when roads are closed, and this will erode support for the Collaborative. Restoring roads for ecological benefits is only one consideration.
- A member suggested that because Travel Management did not analyze the "unauthorized routes" it would be premature to start Subpart A. Since the Forest was looking at the Exchequer land in detail now, this was the appropriate time to revisit the designation of the unauthorized routes.
- A member noted that the Forest and the volunteer Stewards of Sierra National Forest are using State Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Green Sticker grants to pay for maintaining existing roads. The Forest does not currently maintain Level One roads, and private clubs often maintain these roads to reduce environmental impact.
- A member suggested it would be beneficial to first assess the use and impacts of maintaining and improving the routes. The unauthorized routes being examined are currently being used, so analyzing them for their current use and potential monetary value, and then bringing them into the system and maintaining them, could benefit both forest health and public perception
- A member suggested that safety considerations involving catastrophic fire protection, and emergency access for search and rescue, need to also be considered.

- Forest staff noted that there did not seem to be a correlation between marijuana gardens and accessibility to roads on this Forest.
- The facilitator noted that the format of the preliminary Proposed Action did not adhere to the format recommended by the Collaborative earlier in 2014, and should be revised accordingly.
- **Action item: Facilitator** to resend the List of Proposed Action Elements to Ms. Nickerson, Ms. Locke, and Ms. Sorini-Wilson.
- **Action item: All Members** to send additional comments on the preliminary Proposed Action by COB Friday, December 5th to Ms. Nickerson at jnickerson@fs.fed.us.

4. Ongoing Activities

Project Updates

Ms. Sorini-Wilson provided the group with a brief overview of the project updates and noted that plans were underway to continue operations on the Aspen Timber Sale in the spring.

Bug-Kill Update

Mr. Ramiro Rojas presented his findings on past and present tree mortality from insects via GIS. He noted that there had been an increase in overall mortality, primarily in Ponderosa Pines below 5000 feet in elevation; and that that similar results were found in other forests. He highlighted the Soaproot treatments including mechanical thinning and ladder fuel removal and noted that upon reentry, much of the area had around 50% mortality.

- Members asked if any efforts would be made to salvage the remaining timber.
    - Mr. Rojas confirmed that salvage efforts would be made, but may be limited by resources and personnel.

Deputy District Ranger Hiring

Mr. Ray Porter announced that the region has hired Ms. Sarah LaPlante as the new Deputy District Ranger. He provided the group with a brief overview of her background and noted that she would attend the January 15 Collaborative meeting. Mr. Porter also noted that Mr. Dave Martin, District Ranger Bass Lake Ranger District, recently announced his retirement.

Socioeconomic Assessment

Mr. Van Velsor reviewed the 4 objectives that are being developed:

- Use wooden biomass in small diameter trees produced from projects.
- Benefit local economies by providing local employment and training opportunities.
- Gain public support for forest restoration projects.
- Make education and training opportunities available for local community members.

He noted that the next step in the process is to identify questions, indicators, and a data gathering method for the necessary information. He proposed the Collaborative utilize between $2,500 and $5,000 to hire the Sierra Institute of Community and Environment to develop the methodology, which the Collaborative could either use itself or hire a consultant to

implement. The remaining $40,000 would then be utilized to implement the Socioeconomic Monitoring Plan.

Members were supportive of the proposals and recommended that the Socioeconomic Work Group continue to develop the questions and indicators and leave the methodology and data analysis to a professional consultant. Discussion on this topic will continue and a decision will be made at a future Collaborative meeting.

- **Action Item: All Members** to send feedback on utilizing CFRP money to hire a socioeconomic monitoring consultant to Mr. Van Velsor by COB Friday December 5th.

Monitoring Report to Congress

The Monitoring Coordinator provided a brief overview of the monitoring report that was sent to Congress. It included a rating of the ecological indicators such as fire regime restoration, fish and wildlife and meadow restoration on a project and landscape level scale. Overall the Collaborative was rated at 30% project completion, which is on-target given that it is about one-third through its 10 years. There are two versions of the report, one short version per the Congressional request and one detailed version that includes all the assumptions and calculations.

- **Action Item: CCP** to distribute the short and long versions of the Monitoring Report to Congress for member reference.

Regional, Forest and DLRP Budget Update

Mr. Porter reviewed each of the four budget handouts and discussed the process of submitting the budget to the Washington Office for review. He noted that the CFLR had its own budget line item (BLI) , money that is available specifically for the 2015 work. Approximately $1,225,000 was budgeted accordingly to personnel, fleet, and other resources. He also explained the total matching funds expended in 2014, which is broken down into the following areas:

- WFHF (Forest Fuels)
- WFPR (Fire Protection)
- CMRD (Road Maintenance)
- NFTM (Timber Management)
- NFVW (Watershed and soils)
- NFWF (Wildlife and Fisheries)
- CWF2 (Roadwork Collection Agreement with PG&E)
- PSW Owl Monitoring
- PSW Kings River fisher project
- Regional Carnivore Monitoring

Mr. Porter noted that this year the Collaborative would receive approximately $300,000 additional funds to be used in prescribed fire applications. He also highlighted the High Sierra Ranger District Prescribed Fire Budgets for 2011-2014 specific to WFHF and CFLN from the Forest. The final budget Mr. Porter discussed was the Exchequer Planning NEPA, which consisted of a total of $519,992. This figure remains consistent with the expected costs.

- Members recommended revisiting the volunteer hours document to see if any of that could be considered matched funds.
- **Action Item: Ms. Pam Flick and Ms. Sorini-Wilson** to review the volunteer accounting form for use and applicability as matching funds.
- **Action Item: Ms. Sorini-Wilson** and **Facilitator** to verify funding for facilitation.

5. LiDAR Applications to the DLRP

The Collaborative welcomed Dr. Derek Churchill and Dr. Van Kane from the University of Washington, and Dr. Bob McGaughey from the US Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station to discuss the latest LiDAR imaging findings and their application to the Dinkey landscape. The detailed presentation can be downloaded from DataBasin.

- Forest structure is better described by range and variation than by means
- Effects of fire severity on forests are not linear
    - Even no change and low fire severity patches showed substantial structural changes
    - Each forest-fire combination has its own trajectory
    - Low and moderate severities result in wide diversity
    - Fire leaves multistory tree clumps
- The experts noted two key management implications:
    - Low to moderate severity fires best replicate pre-Euro-American forest structures
    - Current forest restorations and low severity prescribed fires typically do not produce the structural heterogeneity of low and moderate severity fires.
- Three reference areas were highlighted from the study.
    - Yosemite, Sequoia-Kings Canyon, and El Dorado are all similar, but Sequoia-Kings Canyon is the closest, providing all the desirable functions.
    - LiDAR is not currently in use in these areas, making comparisons difficult.

Discussion Followed:

- Members thanked the experts for providing a clear and comprehensible presentation and highlighted the nexus between the Ecological Monitoring Plan and the use of LiDAR.
- It would benefit the Collaborative and Region 5 to get LiDAR into areas such as Sequoia-Kings Canyon for better reference conditions.
- **Action Item: Mr. Meyers** to send Mr. Churchill and Mr. Kane the Natural Range of Variability documents from the Region 5 Forest Assessment.
- Members asked if LiDAR could aid in the use of prescribed fire.
    - Experts confirmed that it could, but would be most beneficial spatially and temporally. They noted that LiDAR couldn't replace fuel information but could replace ground plots for canopy cover and clump definition.
    - Treating the understory and midstory of the forest is typically not enough, while low severity fire can remove patches of trees and create a gap-patch landscape.

    - There was a reduction in large tree canopy cover with moderate severity fire.
    - **Action Item: CCP** to send Mr. Churchill and Mr. Kane the reference conditions and indicators spreadsheets.
- Members wondered how to better improve upon the correspondence between Exchequer planning and LiDAR.
    - The benefits of LiDAR were listed including clarity and quality of vegetation maps, and applicability to canopy cover and basal area.
    - **Action Item: CCP** to distribute all the presentations and recreational maps for member reference.

6. Closing Remarks

Emily Adams, CCP, reviewed the day's action items. Ms. Sorini-Wilson thanked members for their time and reminded them that the next meeting was Thursday, January 15, which would also be the Collaborative's four-year anniversary.

7. Attendees

1. Emily Adams, CCP
2. Rich Bagley
3. Stephanie Barnes, USFS
4. Miles Baty
5. Jeff Blewett
6. Dirk Charley, USFS
7. Derek Churchill
8. John Cielnicky, USFS
9. Jaime Collins
10. Narvell Conner
11. Kent Duysen
12. Larry Duysen
13. Robbin Ekman, USFS
14. Dan Fidler
15. Dorian Fougères, CCP
16. Dean Gould, USFS
17. Amy Granat
18. Stan Harger
19. Iveth Hernandez, USFS
20. Andy Hosford, USFS
21. Van Kane
22. Elaine Locke, USFS
23. Bob McGaughey, USFS
24. Marc Meyer, USFS
25. John Mount
26. Jody Nickerson, USFS
27. Chris Oberti
28. Steve Otsuja, USFS
29. Ray Porter, USFS
30. Justine Reynolds
31. Susan Roberts
32. Ramiro Rojas, USFS
33. Greg Schroer, USFS
34. Denaya Shorter, USFS
35. Aimee Smith, USFS
36. Mark Smith
37. Marc Sobel
38. Kim Sorini-Wilson, USFS
39. Erin Stacy
40. Stan Van Velsor