

**Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI)
Regional Coordinating Council Meeting Minutes
October 26, 2011
The Ridge
2020 Golf Course Road
Auburn, CA 95602**

Present:

SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council Members:

Steve Wilensky (Co-Chair) – Calaveras County Supervisor
Warren Alford – Sierra Forest Legacy
Steve Brink – California Forestry Association
Mike Chapel – U.S. Forest Service
Terry Davis – The Sierra Club, Mother Lode Chapter
Jay Francis – The Collins Companies
Bill Haigh – Bureau of Land Management
Cyndi Hillery – Regional Council of Rural Counties
Bob Kirkwood – Sierra Nevada Conservancy Governing Board Liaison
Jonathan Kusel – Sierra Institute for Community and Environment
Kris Kuyper – Sierra Business Council
Frank Stewart – California Fire Safe Council
Craig Thomas – Sierra Forest Legacy
Bill Wickman – Sustainable Forest Action Coalition
Jim Branham – Sierra Nevada Conservancy
Kim Carr – Sierra Nevada Conservancy

By Phone:

Mike DeBonis – Forest Guild

Facilitator:

Gina Bartlett – Center for Collaborative Policy

U.S. Forest Service Staff:

Dan Jiron
Chris Nota
Joe Stringer
Deb Whitall
Deb Whitman

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Staff and Consultants:

Pete Dufour
Nic Enstice
Joan Keegan
Bob Kingman
Mark Stanley

Not Present:

SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council Members:

Bill Nunes (Co-Chair) – Sierra County Supervisor/ Sierra Nevada Conservancy Governing Board Liaison

Dave Bischel- California Forestry Association

Dave Graber – National Park Service

Eric Holst – Environmental Defense Fund

Valerie Klinefelter – California Association of Resource Conservation and Development Districts

Mark Rentz – Association of California Water Agencies

Susan Skalski – U.S. Forest Service

I. Discussion on Implementation of the Leadership Intent with the U.S. Forest Service

Summary of the goals for this discussion:

- The Forest Service provided an overview of the Leadership Intent (LI) for Ecological Restoration.
- Interests in the Coordinating Council forming a partnership in the LI – what role should the Coordinating Council take.
- Action items that we can use to move the LI forward.

A. Overview of the Relationships of Leadership Intent – Led by Dan Jiron

This is a great opportunity for us to touch base with you on the items we are looking into and to get feedback. Together we have been working on the Leadership Intent as well as where we are headed with ecological restoration. In California, we are moving forward on these fronts to a greater degree than anywhere else in the country and I am grateful for that. The big question is: What is next? One part is to move forward on an implementation plan for the Leadership Intent. Another part, which will be discussed later, is to look at scientific synthesis similar to the General Technical Reports (GTR) we have done for ecological restoration.

We are facing a number of challenges, one of which is the budget. Our administration has its priorities, such as high-priority watersheds, fuel plans, and vegetation management plans. How do we align these initiatives to work together to get the biggest bang for our buck? Internally, we can look at improving our management efficiencies, such as National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes and internal analysis. Additionally, how do we find and engage new partnerships with our budget? Most people look at their water bills and they think about the infrastructure that delivers the water, such as the plumbing and pipes, but they do not really think about the forests where the water originates. How do we tell our story to bring them and their resources to the table?

The U.S. Forest Service has projects that are ongoing that need to be finished under the existing forest plans. However, updated forest plans that incorporate new information and science will be crucial for long-term management as well as for our collaborations. The forest plans help guide the decisions that the neighboring

communities and our partners make and GTRs and forest analyses should not be things that nobody outside the Forest Service have ever heard of.

B. The Implementation of the Leadership Intent – Led by Chris Nota and Deb Whitman

In the course of the development of the Leadership Intent (LI) draft, it was discussed internally at the Forest Service, it will be discussed during this meeting, and then it will go back for review by a small internal group. We hope that the LI will be a living document that will be updated at least once a year.

Chapter 4 – Yearly Implementation Plan for Regional Office/ Director Areas

This is the heart of the LI, which outlines the plan. It includes both an annual progress report on ecological restoration and goals for the coming year. It would also be used to document both successes and failures.

Chapter 5 – Yearly Implementation Plan for Each Forest

Nine billion dollars worth of water comes from Forest Service lands, and here we can tell the story of each forest and its accomplishments. The forests will be able to articulate where they will place their focus for the coming years as well as a wish list for projects they would like to do but do not have the funding for. Adaptive management will be part of this, as forests report on adjustments to processes that did not work.

Chapter 6 – Strategic Partnership Investment Plan

The Forest Service is still brainstorming on partnership plans. One element is “who cares about the water that comes from Forest Service Lands?” Another is to focus on the partnerships that are most important for achieving our goals.

There are 56 ranger districts that are proud of the 200,000 acres of ecological restoration projects they currently do. Every year, each district has a full plate of projects they are implementing, such as meadow restoration, completing current projects and contracts, performing NEPA for future projects, and looking for collaborations. All of this is happening within the box of the current Forest Service budget. The Forest Service wants to work with the SNFCI Coordinating Council to get from where we are now, to where we want to be.

Comments and Questions

Frank Stewart – Will targets be assigned, how do we support and acknowledge existing partners, and does the Forest Service define what restoration is?

Forest Service – There are existing targets, but the Forest Service is looking into how to better refine the targets so that they get the forests to where we want them to go. Another element is how to best train people to achieve the targets. There has been a variation of success on that front. We do need to ensure that the existing partnerships and collaborations are acknowledged and engaged. The

Forest Service does define what restoration is, but the target may need to be adjusted to ensure that the on-the-ground work is performed the best way possible.

Public Comment: Chad Hanson (The John Muir Project) – On page 2 of the Leadership Intent, it says that “these forests are susceptible to severe wildfire...” Based on the wording of the Leadership Intent it appears that the Forest Service views high-severity fires as bad when there is clear science that demonstrates the need for some high-severity fires to occur within the forests. Likewise, Malcolm North, in writing the GTR 220 purposefully did not address the topic of high-severity fires and it needs to be clear that the GTR 220 is not intended to address every forest need.

Forest Service – The Forest Service has adjusted the Leadership Intent to say that all fire is not bad. The Leadership Intent is a living document and we will make further adjustments to it, including making it clearer that all fire is not bad.

Steve Wilensky – What is the relationship between the Leadership Intent and other processes that are parallel to it, and will those processes be joined to it?

Forest Service – Each individual piece of land needs to be assessed as to what healthy would look like. Then others can come in to work together and align their own processes towards that common goal. The important part is to be unified on the ideas and what the goals are.

Jim Branham – Are there going to be rewards for forests who best follow the roadmap laid out for them?

Forest Service – There is a focus on where the work is headed, as well as the training, the processes, and the “how”. New ideas and new science will be integrated into training and we need to ensure that we are not locked into training methods that are not flexible to new techniques and information.

Jim Branham – In the past collaborative groups have put a lot of effort into an approach and then things occur at the Forest Service level that seem contradictory to the collaborative efforts. Do you anticipate that the Leadership Intent will help focus these processes?

Forest Service – Coordination of effort will improve through the Leadership Intent. Ideas at different levels of the organization are not necessarily reaching outside of those levels, which is a complicated process. The Forest Service is working to focus the science and the training and to align the process with the Forest Supervisors. This alignment is not where it should be and the Forest Service hopes the Leadership Intent will help get them there.

Bob Kirkwood – What changes are occurring internally at the Forest Service to prevent planning paralysis?

Forest Service – The Forest Service senses an urgency to move on projects in the right way, the challenge is to make it easier to take action and to direct the work in the proper direction.

Cyndi Hillery - Can more structure be added so that the policies and goals are not moving targets and therefore groups undertaking projects would feel more secure that the policies in place at the start of the project will still exist for the duration of the project?

Craig Thomas – We are on new ground with engaged dialogue, working in an inspired manner that takes art and science to adapt. I think we are on to something with this process and I don't spend my time the way I used to.

Bill Haigh – Social economics have not been emphasized in the past and we need to make sure it is part of the plan as we move forward.

Public Comment, David Edelson (The Nature Conservancy) – With limited budgets as a major obstacle, would it be possible to use funding as a carrot, rewarding the forests that follow the guidelines with more funding than those that do not?

Forest Service – To some degree it is possible, but it may also be possible to instead transfer both technology and information from successful forests to those that are less successful.

Kim Carr – Are there any examples in the US of other regions undertaking a process like this? Is there a timeline? And how can the Coordinating Council assist you with it?

Forest Service – The Forest Service is looking at a 5 year implementation plan but there is no timeline to complete the implementation strategy. The role the Coordinating Council can play is in providing input, both in the planning and implementation phases, especially on the social economic angle.

Jonathan Kusel – How does the Forest Service engage its 8,000 employees if they are not ready for this change? How does the Forest Service engage outside groups that are ready to move forward with the Forest Service on projects?

Forest Service – The Forest Service will not abandon efforts it is currently engaged in. Forest Supervisors will develop plans that integrate more elements of ecological restoration to provide the greatest benefits for the buck.

Steve Brink – An “All-Lands Approach” needs to be included as well as experimentation. Current science will never have all of the answers and further experimentation will be needed in order for the science to progress.

C. Status of Forest Plan Update Process – Led by Joe Stringer & Deb Whittall

The Forest Service understands the importance of incorporating economic issues in the plan and in order to be successful the Forest Service would like help with this from the Coordinating Council. The new planning rule will be published in December and finalized in January. Our first step is to develop an assessment for both the large scale and the forest-level scale to meet both ecological and social needs. The assessment would be a snapshot of the trends at the landscape scale: ecological, economic, and social. We will be looking at the unique role each forest can play in its area, how private lands can be part of the process, and who can and should be a part of the process. Two very complex pieces of the process are the social element and how to develop a monitoring process that is integrated into the process rather than developed as an afterthought.

There are many different ecosystem services offered by each forest that diverse groups want access to and meeting those needs will be a challenge. One focus will be to divert money away from forest planning into projects. This will be achieved by staffing one core team of planners in the regional office to coordinate with each forest's forest planner. Typically, forest plans can take 4 to 6 years at a cost of \$3 to \$5 million but our goal is to reduce the process to 2 years and a cost of \$1.5 million and put the rest of the resources in to forest restoration projects. In the past, with litigation, it seemed like a game of ping pong where the ball kept bouncing back into the different courts until someone won. We want to change the game to a situation where both sides work together and win. We want to develop one model for both the forest plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) at the regional level and then adapt it to each forest to reduce costs and time. At this point we spend a lot of money to buffer ourselves against potential legal action and we are hoping that the collaborative effort will allow us to work out issues away from the court room so we can spend the money on projects instead of litigation.

The Forest Service needs help on two fronts: capacity and legitimacy. We are attempting to develop indicators for success on a number of fronts, including for our work with collaborations and for the social and economic scales. At the bio-regional scale, how can we best move the resources and information to those who need it? What will success look like? When considering the city, county, and state levels, it is clear that their policies affect us similar to how our policies influence them. How do we get to the point where we can look at a landscape, determine what is best, and then develop a holistic approach to projects? The assessment process will start at the southern edge of the Sierra Nevada and move northward.

Comments and Questions

Craig Thomas – It is important that everybody makes a different commitment to this process this time around. We have to get it right this time. I have been at this for 25 years and the old method is not working as the ecosystems are in worse shape than ever. We have to be honest with each other as to our strengths and weaknesses, take the leap, and go all out together, despite how scary that may seem.

Steve Wilensky – We have to go about this process in a good-faith way instead of trying to solve these complex problems from our respective bunkers. How do we develop trust across city, state, federal, and agency lines so that we can share budgets and tools in an integrated way rather than chasing our tails forever? Can this be done before the local businesses that we will need to be successful go out of business? What infrastructure will be left in the Sierra Nevada by the time this process reaches the ground in a large-scale way? This Coordinating Council can help guide the Forest Service towards personnel resources with the experience necessary to address the questions currently being posed by the Forest Service. And we can start by working with existing collaboratives that have reached a consensus and know how to work together to achieve a common goal. We need to figure out what we can do in specific areas and do it in real time.

Public Comment, Chad Hanson – Will ecological restoration be defined?

Craig Thomas – Species composition has changed considerably from historical conditions, is the goal to go back to these conditions or to promote resilient ecosystems? There is never going to be a perfect answer and there will always be a risk, but we need to make the best hard choices possible based on the science and experimentation.

Jim Branham – All of the items under discussion can be demonstrated on the ground through demonstration projects such as Sierra Cascade All Lands Enhancement (SCALE) to see how well it works. The Region needs to embrace this project or let us know you are not interested.

Cyndi Hillery – Federal agencies should engage local government early in the process to avoid future issues.

Warren Alford – The conversation has focused on vegetation and social needs, but others to consider are: recreation, grazing, scenic rivers, etc. Also, in terms of the budget, keep fire suppression crews working in the off years. Let's do small scale on the big scale.

Action: A working group will develop an action plan, which will be presented to the Coordinating Council for review and comment in the January meeting. Joe Stringer, Deb Whitall, and Chris Nota will be the contacts for the working group.

The working group includes:

Steve Wilensky, Craig Thomas, Steve Brink, Cyndi Hillery, Frank Stewart, Jonathan Kusel, Mike Chapel, David Edelson, Jim Branham, and Kim Carr

II. Recap of Actions from June Meeting and Announcements

Jim Branham – The initial letter drafted in support of the reauthorization of rural schools was not universally supported within the Coordinating Council.

Steve Brink – There are currently two different bills in Congress that are under consideration. Both pieces of legislation take \$328 million in reauthorization funds from the U.S. Forest Service budget to pay for it, which could be a serious problem. However, the reauthorization needs to be more than just money for the schools but should be tied to job creation. There needs to be students for the teachers to teach.

Action: Steve Brink will draft a one or two paragraph letter of general support for the reauthorization of rural schools, which will be circulated amongst the Coordinating Council for review. More detailed specifics will be addressed as the legislation moves forward.

III. Local Collaborative Report Out

Steve Wilensky and Jonathan Kusel, SCALE: The Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG) and Burney-Hat Creek group had been working on Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) plans independently and recently began working together on how to apply their actions to more than one area. The two groups have traded ideas and toured each others' sites. They are currently seeking to advance a demonstration project together.

Kim Carr, Mokelumne Watershed Environmental Benefits Project: Located within the area of the ACCG project, this project is attempting to identify the environmental benefits of forest health restoration. The watershed provides water to East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), hydropower to PG&E, and the primary land managers are Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service, and range and farm land. The project is looking into the question of what are the avoided costs from investing in fire prevention and road decommissioning/upgrading to prevent associated wildfire costs. The funding is being provided by the Forest Service, SNC and National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

ACCG Update: Funding from BLM for a thinning project was able to go to a local contractor because of the existence of the local collaborative.

Craig Thomas, Dinkey Creek Collaborative: The collaborative is currently planning projects two years out and is doing field tours. The outcomes will be shared on October 28th. Craig Thomas may provide an update and lessons learned from this experience in the January SNFCI Coordinating Council meeting.

IV. Upcoming Meetings

The Coordinating Council has agreed to meet quarterly in 2012, on the 4th Wednesday of the appropriate months. The next Coordinating Council meeting will be held on January 25th, 2012, at 10:00am – 2:00pm.

V. Announcements of Upcoming Events/Issues

Jim Branham: The Governor has directed the California Public Utilities Commission to consider authorizing a Public Goods Charge (PGC) on electricity, given the legislature's failure to reauthorize the current PGC. They have also opened a 10-day comment period for the Feed-In Tariff. Several groups are sending in comments to include biomass in the Feed-In Tariff and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy intends to do so.

Jim Branham: The pre-application phase has recently closed for the SNC Healthy Forests Grant Program and the SNC has received over 200 pre-applications, far exceeding the expected response. The SNC hopes to work with other groups, such as Cal Fire, to fund projects that the SNC is unable to fund. The large number of grant applications demonstrates the need for additional funding for projects in these areas.