

# **Eastern Sierra Climate & Communities Resilience Project**

## **October 14, 2021**

### **Meeting Summary**

#### **1. Welcome & Introductions**

##### **a. Attendees**

- Allan Pietrasanta, Sierra Business Council
- Bob Gardner, Mono County
- Carol Blanchette, UC Natural Reserve System
- Carol Snow, CAL FIRE
- Chance Traub, Inyo National Forest
- Daniel Holler, TOML
- David Page, Winter Wildlands Alliance
- Elaine Kabala, ESCOG
- Erin Noesser, Inyo National Forest
- Frank Frievault, MLFPD
- Genevieve Cross, Southern California Edison
- Holly Alpert, Eastern California Water Association
- Janet Hatfield, Plumas Corporation
- Jasin Wingard, Inyo National Forest
- Jason Smith, TSS Consultants
- Jessica Mitchell, Ascent Environmental
- Jonathan Contreras, Southern California Edison
- Kelsey Glastetter, Plumas Corporation
- Kim Anaclerio, Mammoth Lakes Recreation
- Kim Cooke, TOML
- Malcolm Clark, Sierra Club
- Malcolm North, USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station
- Marc Meyer, USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station
- Matt Driscoll, Sierra Nevada Conservancy
- Monica Buhler, Devils Postpile National Monument
- Nathan Sill, Inyo National Forest
- Rick Kattelmann, Plumas Corp. & Eastern California Water Association
- Scott Kusumoto, Inyo National Forest
- Stacy Corless, Mono County
- Steve Baule, LADWP
- Steven Calkins, Inyo National Forest
- Taro Pusina, Spatial Informatics Group
- Tom Hodges, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area

#### **2. Summer Recap**

##### **a. 2021 Fire Season Highlights**

A brief overview of the 2021 Fire Season was provided. On a national level in 2021 thus far, the acres burned and the number of fires is not of any particular significance when compared to recent fire records. This is due to a variety of factors, two of which are that wo

entire regions (Alaska, and Desert Southwest) had fire seasons well below normal, which helped to bring the National average down.

Although the national fire season review was nothing of significance, California broke numerous significant records including:

- California experienced a record drought
- The single largest wildfire in California history (Dixie)
- Two fires crossed the Sierra Crest (Caldor & Dixie, this had never happened prior)
- 69 consecutive days at [National Wildland Preparedness Level](#) (PL) PL 5
- Four of the fires that burned this year made the [Top 20 Largest California Wildfires](#) list

Over the last 89 years of record-keeping, 18 of the top 20 Largest California Wildfires have happened in the last 20 years. Fires in the last two years account for over half of the top 20 Largest California Wildfires in history.

#### **Success Story of the Year — Caldor Fire**

The Caldor Fire occurred under extreme drought and wind conditions yet was a success story due to comprehensive fuels management, interagency evacuation planning, and good defensible space compliance. The fuels management efforts were instrumental in allowing response personnel to take direct action under extreme conditions. To learn more about the Caldor Fire events in more detail check out:

- Story Map: [These maps show where prescribed burns helped curb the Caldor Fire's rapid growth](#)
- Web Map: [Caldor Fire Structure Status](#)

#### **b. Project Funding Updates**

In recent months, the ESCCRP received funding from multiple grant sources that have been awarded to various local organizations. These funding awards will work towards achieving the goals of the ESCCRP and will contribute to overall project success.

##### \$3.4 Million – Eastern Sierra Pace & Scale Accelerator

- Funding Agency: CDFW
- Program Priority: Managing Headwaters for Multiple Benefits
- Grant Applicant: ESCOG
- Deliverables: Completion of NEPA analysis for ESCCRP and surveys on 10,000 priority acres
- Shoutouts: Funding NEPA analysis is one of the most significant hurdles of these types of projects. This award would not have been made possible without the hard work and support of Janet Hatfield, Dr. Rick Kattelman, Dr. Holly Alpert, Erin Noesser, Kelsey Glastetter, the INF, and the ESCOG (Inyo County, Mono County, Town of Mammoth Lakes, and the City of Bishop). The collaborative support for this grant is what made this application a success.

##### \$4.9 Million – ESCCRP: Phase 1 Implementation

- Funding Agency: CAL FIRE

- Program Priority: Forest Health Grant Program
- Grant Applicant: INF
- Deliverables: Implementation on 2,156 acres
  - 566 acres hand thinning
  - 748 acres mechanical thinning
  - 300 acres broadcast burning
  - 542 acres pile burning
- Shoutouts: This award came as more of a surprise given the ESCCRP was still in the early project planning phases. CAL FIRE approached ESCCRP staff and invited the ESCCRP to submit a proposal to their directed award grant program to implement acres within the ESCCRP. The ESCCRP staff worked with the INF worked to put forward a list of acres that are ready to implement and prepare a project proposal. Thank you to CALFIRE and the Inyo National Forest staff, a special shout out to Nathan Sill, Stephen Calkins, Jeff Karl, and Scott Kusumoto.
- What made it ALL possible: The alignment of the State of CA with R5 USFS, early planning by the INF, \$5 million in in-kind matching funds from SCE, and the collaborative effort — thank you to all of you for taking the time to help make this project a reality!

\$20,000 – Working from the Home Outward

- Funding Agency: Southern California Edison
- Program Priority: Community Partner Grant
- Grant Applicant: Whitebark Institute
- Deliverables: Defensible Space & Home Hardening Education within TOML
- Shoutouts: This grant will help gain momentum for the ESCCRP Outreach & Education. This grant will focus on the resident and community mitigation aspect of transitioning Mammoth to becoming a fire adapted community and will be completed in partnership with Mammoth Lakes Fire Safe Council and the Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District.

**c. Planning Progress & Review of Final Tasks**

**SNC Task Deliverables**

1. Boundary Revisions- The project boundary is near final. There may be a few small adjustments depending on conversations with the Town and LADWP about potential additional acres for inclusion.
2. Goals & Objectives- The final [Goals & Objectives document](#) was completed this summer and is available on the Stakeholder Information webpage.
3. Needs Assessment- We are about halfway through the needs assessment process. We have work plan drafts for each of the Ad Hoc Focal Teams. The next step is to present each of the work plans to the stakeholder group and finalize them early in the new year. These documents will serve as a roadmap to help us prepare the project for success.

4. RFP Development for Environmental Planning Services- The RFP is currently in draft form and to finish we are waiting for the proposed actions. Once proposed actions are complete, the RFP will be finalized and circulated.
5. Proposed Actions for 55,000 acres- The INF is working on the proposed actions and is anticipated to present a draft to the Group at the January 2022 meeting.

**Question regarding the number of debris piles to be produced from the project-** The INF responded stating they intend to use the full spectrum of opportunities to deal with the biomass generated through fuels reduction efforts: pile burning, chipping, fuel wood sales, public fuel wood cutting, timber sales, prescribed fire, and biomass utilization. We are constrained by what options are available to us given the remote nature of the eastside. Without a viable biomass utilization option, we have very few options available to us. There are currently efforts to address the biomass issues of the region, but until those efforts become a reality, we will be seeing piles on the landscape.

**d. Proposed Actions Update**

Stephen Calkins, Chance Traub, Marc Meyer, Malcolm North, and Taro Pusina have been working as a focal team to develop proposed actions for the ESCCRP. The group is working to identify the pathways to achieve the desired conditions laid out in the INF Land Management Plan. The team is working on integrating new management practices into the proposed actions. In addition to forested areas, they are addressing specific concerns including roads, infrastructure, and the Ski Area. Some areas have already been treated within the project area and the group is considering previous treatments and addressing the required maintenance of previous treatments. The group is scheduled to present draft proposed actions in early 2022.

**3. Needs Assessment Ad Hoc Team Presentations**

To recap, the Needs Assessment identified focus areas and broke out over the course of the summer months into smaller Ad Hoc Focal Teams to develop topic specific work plans as an opportunity to get organized and communicate the needs of the project. We elected to work in the smaller focused groups to encourage engagement from stakeholders and maximize efficiency. Thank you to all of you who participated over the summer.

The Focal Teams were provided a work plan template which included standard content and format. Items included in each workplan will be Goals & Objectives, Importance, ESCCRP Relevance, Regional Application, Task List, Deliverables, and a Budget. Each Team worked to populate the template and will present their work plans to the Stakeholder Group at meetings now through January 2022.

A brief overview of the work plans presented is provided below. The meeting provided an opportunity for the overall stakeholder group to offer input on the work plans presented. The team leaders will work to incorporate comments suggested in the stakeholder meeting into their topic's work plan. Final drafts of work plans will be compiled and submitted to SNC as a deliverable under the scope of our current grant agreement in 2022.

**a. Biomass Work Plan Presentation**

The purpose of the Biomass Ad Hoc Focal Team is to identify biomass technology needs through technical analyses of current and future forest restoration projects in the eastern Sierra. A unique approach for this work was warranted given the biomass conversation has been going on for a long time in the eastern Sierra. In 2014, Mono County completed “A Comprehensive Feasibility Study for a Heat and/or Power Biomass Facility and Expanded Forest Products Utilization in Mono County, California”. The collaborative group that has been working on addressing biomass in the region in the past are continuing their efforts through this focal team.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) funded a grant to California Trout (CalTrout) who partnered with Plumas Corp. to perform several technical tasks to aid in identifying biomass solutions for the eastern Sierra. The grant tasks are to perform a feasibility study for short-term removal of biomass generated during fuels reduction at June Mountain (a CalTrout project) and improve planning for long-term biomass removal and processing from other forest health and fuels reduction projects (namely the ESCCRP). That grant proposal was used to help develop the Biomass work plan and the grant is funding necessary steps for ESCCRP biomass team.

No comments were provided from the stakeholder group on the Biomass work plan.

**b. Outreach & Education Work Plan Presentation**

The purpose of the Outreach & Education (O&E) Ad Hoc Focal Team is to identify the steps to develop a road map to help build understanding of and support for the ESCCRP. The team identified target audiences and developed tasks to effectively reach each of the target audiences. The team focused on inclusivity when identifying target audiences and developing the task list. The work plan acknowledged one-time tasks and called out tasks that will require annual efforts to be effective.

A suggestion to the work plan presented at the meeting was to involve local artists in the project. This idea was inspired by a traveling [public art exhibition on forest and fire](#). It was also suggested that if there is a space available in Mammoth, we could invite the exhibition to come to the eastern Sierra.

Another suggestion presented at the meeting was to incorporate messaging around some of the beetle outbreaks in the project area and incorporate that messaging into the demonstration forest task.

A comment provided praise on the multiple efforts to educate the youth. The comment recognized the importance of kids growing up in these forested communities needing to understand the value of these forested landscapes.

**4. Meeting Wrap-Up and Next Steps**

Originally the next meeting was scheduled for November 11<sup>th</sup> but has been moved due to Veterans Day. The new meeting date is **November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1-3 pm.**

Next Steps:

**a. November**

- Research & Monitoring work plan presentation
- Workforce Development work plan presentation

**b. December**

- Prioritization work plan presentations
- Finance & Marketing Plan work plan presentation

**c. January**

- Project Operations –
  1. Draft Proposed Actions- USFS
  2. Other Operational Considerations

**d. February**

- Final monthly meeting
- Move to Quarterly Meetings from here forward with the use of Ad Hoc Teams for topical progress as needed.