*Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute*

# Meeting Brief

* The Planning Work Group (WG) received a presentation about the PG&E Integrated Vegetation Management Program Environmental Assessment (EA). Planning WG did not recommend for the ACCG to submit comments on the PG&E project because of limited time. However, the WG encouraged individual ACCG members to submit comments by the May 17th deadline.
* The Planning WG had a comprehensive discussion of the Power Fire Pre-Commercial Thinning project. The Amador Ranger District will follow-up with Sierra Forest Legacy and incorporate comments into the Proposed Action (PA) received by other ACCG members in anticipation of bringing the project to the full ACCG membership for consensus support.
* The Planning WG will review a revised project development process package at the May WG meeting and present to the ACCG at the June general meeting.
* The Planning WG established the parameters for the Arnold Avery project Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT) analysis which will take place at the May Planning WG meeting.

# Action Items

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| **Actions** | **Point Person(s)** |
| UMWRA and Forest Service coordinate to identify NEPA ready projects within a month that are ready to seek funding in the immediate term for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy [Forest Health](https://sierranevada.ca.gov/grants-and-funding-sources/) grant opportunity. | Rick Hopson  Joe Aragon  Rich Farrington |
| Place on the Planning WG May agenda Three Meadows Project design review. | Tania Carlone  Joe Aragon  Gwen Starrett |
| Share with the Calaveras and the ACCG the Forest Service’s updated insurance policies before the summer field season. | Rick Hopson |
| Incorporate into the Power Fire PCT:   * protection measures for foothill yellow-legged frog design criteria in the Power Fire Pre-Commercial Thinning (PCT) project PA; * relevant Ecological Design Framework recommendations into the Power Fire PCT project; * a statement about keeping the costs of hand vs. mechanical thinning manageable. | Rick Hopson  Marc Young |
| Follow up with Sierra Forest Legacy to receive any additional comments on the updated Power Fire PCT PA. If supportive, prepare all necessary materials to receive ACCG project support at the May 15, 2019 general meeting. | Rick Hopson  Marc Young |
| Review ACCG Project Development & Approval materials and send comments to Tania by Friday, May 17. | All |

# Summary

## Planning Work Group March Meeting Action Items Review

The Planning Work Group (WG) reviewed the action items from March and identified three items that remain in progress, including:

1. **Identification of NEPA Ready Forest Service Projects for Sierra Nevada Conservancy Forest Health Grants:** UMRWA and Forest Service will coordinate to identify NEPA ready projects to seek funding in the immediate term. Rick Hopson and Rich Farrington will schedule a meeting within the next couple of weeks to move this forward. Rich indicated that after a meeting with the Amador Ranger District, he would coordinate with Joe Aragon to schedule a meeting for the same purpose with the Calaveras Ranger District, particularly in light of the SNC’s upcoming [Forest Health](https://sierranevada.ca.gov/grants-and-funding-sources/) funding opportunity. Joe suggested that parts of the Hemlock project would be a good candidate for this funding cycle. Rick specified that the Amador Ranger District is also seeking funding for the Power Fire Pre-Commercial Thinning project. All agreed that they will aim to confirm projects for the next SNC funding round (pre-application due in summer 2019) within a month.
2. **Three Meadows Design Review:** Gwen Starrett gave an update on the timeline for design review for the Three Meadows Project. She estimated that it would be about a month before the design will be ready for ACCG review. The Amador Ranger District will have an opportunity to review the design before it is brought to the ACCG. The intent is to bring the design to the ACCG Planning WG at the May meeting to receive input from the ACCG before scoping begins.
3. **Updated Forest Service Insurance Policies:** Rick will send updated Forest Service insurance policy information to the ACCG before the summer field season gets underway.

## PG&E Integrated Vegetation Management Program Environmental Assessment (EA)

**Project Overview & Intent:** Karen Quidichay, consultant to PG&E, gave a presentation describing project status and how PG&E had addressed ACCG comments that were submitted in the Spring of 2017. The Draft EA is out for public review. The 30-day comment period closes on May 17, 2019. PG&E conducted substantial consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). As a result, PG&E received a signed Letter of Concurrence from the USFWS in October 2018. In 2017, the ACCG made comments requesting to minimize the use of herbicides in order to minimize the risk to sensitive organisms, such as amphibians and sensitive plants. Karen explained that PG&E will minimize the use of herbicides to the extent possible while still meeting the purpose and needs of the project. PG&E consulted with Forest Service specialists and incorporated all USFWS conservation measures for the protection of sensitive wildlife and to protect water quality. PG&E intends to use herbicides for the first two years to establish mature grass/forb complexes to prevent catastrophic fire and for public safety within the right of way. The herbicides will be applied using spot treatment with backpack sprayers. Mastication will occur on relatively flat areas before herbicide application. The intention is to use less and less herbicides over time. The ACCG also requested that PG&E consider the use of domestic animal grazing as an alternative. Karen explained that PG&E uses goat grazing on some of its projects but analyzed goat grazing for this project and eliminated the option because of concerns about how to protect sensitive plants. PG&E is open to considering goat grazing as an alternative in the long term.

After discussion, the Planning Work Group recommended that the ACCG as a collaborative not submit comments on the EA as a result of limited time. The WG agreed that it is particularly difficult to comment on projects that are so dated. In order for the ACCG to have adequate time to make consensus comments, the collaborative would need at least 2 months leading up to the comment-submission deadline to: 1) review background materials; 2) discuss comments at the Planning WG; and, 3) bring a consensus recommendation before the general membership for action. Planning WG members encouraged individual ACCG members to submit comments individually. Rick noted that for those who are interested in submitting comments on the EA, it is important to do so in order to gain standing during the objection process.

As a result of this discussion, Rick mentioned that it would be helpful to have a future conversation about what kinds of forest-wide decisions the Planning WG would like the Forest Service to bring to the ACCG. He raised the Over-Snow Vehicle (OSV) as an example of a forest-wide decision that may be of interest to the ACCG.

## Amador Ranger District, El Dorado National Forest, 2019 Power Fire Pre-Commercial Thinning (PCT) Project

**Project Overview & Intent:** Rick summarized outcomes from the last Planning WG meeting regarding the Power Fire PCT project. He reminded the WG that the project comprises 11,000 acres of hand and mechanical thinning. Approximately 3,500 acres within the project area are plantations. The rest of the acreage is comprised of residual stands and natural regeneration. He noted that the current PA is not intended to address all Power Fire issues and it would be helpful to work with the ACCG to identify what other actions might be needed in the Power Fire landscape. He suggested that a field trip in July could provide an opportunity to address what other future decisions might be warranted in the Power Fire area.

**Discussion**

At the March meeting, ACCG members identified some concerns related to stand heterogeneity, the use of prescribed fire, design criteria for foothill yellow-legged frog, and noxious weed management. The Amador Ranger District (RD) convened a follow-up conference call with Foothill Conservancy, Sierra Forest Legacy, and CSERC where the following topics were discussed.

* On the topics of design criteria for foothill yellow-legged frog and noxious weed management, Liz Gregg stated that CSERC is comfortable with the weed management materials Rick sent following the March meeting and that the only missing information is an understanding of the actual extent of noxious weeds in the proposed project area. Rick suggested that it would be appropriate to consult with a botanist on the Amador RD to get the relevant information. Liz also suggested that design criteria for the foothill yellow-legged frog, consistent with GTR-248, be included in the PA.
* Following the conference call, Ben Solvesky, Sierra Forest Legacy, and Katherine Evatt, Foothill Conservancy, emailed suggested language to include in the PA to address concerns associated with the above stated concerns. The suggested language is as follows:
  1. begin to move plantations toward a more-natural forest condition in terms of tree size and age class diversity and horizontal and vertical heterogeneity.
  2. create conditions that allow for the near-term use of prescribed fire as a management tool.
  3. to the extent feasible, mimic fire as a natural disturbance process by creating and retaining gaps between clumps of trees at the stand level to promote natural regeneration and move the stands toward a spatially heterogeneous and uneven-age condition. Determining the size, number, and shape of gaps within units would take into consideration slope, aspect, species composition, and other factors consistent with the principles of GTR-220 and GTR-237.
  4. to the extent feasible, employ prescribed fire to remove surface and ladder fuels, prune younger trees, select for more fire-resistant trees, promote natural regeneration in forest openings, and increase heterogeneity through low levels of stochastic tree mortality.
* The Amador Ranger District incorporated some of the proposed language into the PA. However, they were concerned about including specific language about creating gaps and clumps. Planning WG members suggested that the Forest Service may be able to achieve the objective stated in #3 above in the fuels approach since there will be gaps/clumps left from tree mortality. The project could opportunistically take advantage of those gaps and clumps to achieve the stated objective. All agreed that a field trip would help visualize what these gaps could look like.
* Gwen Starrett requested that the PA acknowledge the ecological design framework (Table 9). Rick agreed to review the ecological design framework recommendations and incorporate relevant recommendations into the PA.
* Rich Farrington raised the importance of understanding the comparative costs of hand vs. mechanical thinning. All agreed that the actual costs depend on tree size, underlining that the larger the tree size, the greater the cost, particularly for hand removal. Rich suggested to include in the PA a statement about keeping the costs manageable.
* Craig Ostergaard, Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI), stated SPI’s interest in working with the Forest Service on developing a fuel break strategy that could include developing compartments on the landscape and establishing wider dozer lines for fire-fighting. This is another topic that could be discussed on a field trip.

The Amador Ranger District will attempt to complete all follow-up activities to bring the Power Fire PCT project to the ACCG general meeting for support.

## ACCG Project Development & Approval Process

As a result of limited time, the Planning WG agreed to review the project development and approval materials before May’s Planning WG meeting and to come prepared to discuss recommended changes.

## Arnold Avery Project SWOT Analysis

The Planning WG referred this topic to the May WG meeting agenda. However, in the time that was available, the WG discussed how to frame the discussion. The WG agreed that, in keeping with the ACCG’s MOA, the Planning WG’s role is to document the Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats, and Opportunities (SWOT) and report that SWOT analysis to the full ACCG at a general meeting. Planning WG members agreed that the conversation should not re-hash areas of disagreement but should aim to address the following questions:

* What was the expected outcome of collaboration?
* In what ways did collaboration break down?
* What were the issues that prevented the group from reaching consensus?
* What can we learn from this?
* What went well?

Joe Aragon informed the group that the Calaveras Ranger District will not be using CFLR funds for project implementation.

## Roundtable Updates and Information Sharing

**Decision Framework Workshop:** The Monitoring WG’s Decision Framework Workshop on Climate Vulnerability for Meadows will be held Thursday, May 9th from 10-3 at the Amador County Health and Human Services Building conference room E located at 10877 Conductor Blvd, Sutter Creek.  
**Monitoring Work Group:** Marc Young will get back to Gwen to update monitoring on Spur 19.  
**CalFire Grants:** ACCG members submitted 15 separate proposals to CalFire and only received one grant award. John Heissenbuttal will be meeting with a representative from CalFire to better understand CalFire’s priorities and why the ACCG landscape did not perform well in this round.  
**Foothill Conservancy Event:** Rick Hopson informed the Planning WG that the Foothill Conservancy’s annual fundraiser will take place on May 19th.   
**SCALE Workshop:** Will take place on May 30-31.  
**Upcoming Field Trips:** Following the June Planning WG meeting, there will be a field trip on June 26th in the Scottiago project area. Other field trips this summer include the Power Fire and Hemlock project areas.

## Future Meetings

The next Planning Work Group meeting will be on May 22, 2019 from 9-noon at the Calaveras Ranger District in Hathaway Pines. Agenda topics will include: ACCG Project Development & Approval process package review; Three Meadows project design review; Arnold Avery Project SWOT analysis.

# Meeting Participants

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| **Name** | **Affiliation** | **Miles** | **Time** |
| Joseph Aragon | Calaveras Ranger District | 100 | 6 |
| Megan Layhee | CSERC | 100 | 7 |
| Liz Gregg | CSERC | 160 | 7 |
| Gwen Starrett | Local Resident | 20 | 5 |
| Tony Valdes | Foothill Conservancy | 115 | 4 |
| Rich Farrington | UMRWA/AWA | 10 | 4 |
| Rick Hopson | USFS | 0 | 4 |
| Jesse Plummer | USFS | 0 | 6 |
| Paul Leusch | USFS | 0 | 4 |
| Marc Young | USFS | 0 | 4 |
| Karen Quidichay | Landmark Consulting | 100 | 4 |
| Craig Ostergaard | Sierra Pacific Industries | 10 | 4 |
| Tania Carlone | Facilitator, Consensus Building Institute | 200 | 8 |