

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

General Meeting Notes, August 21, 2019, Sutter Creek, CA

## Meeting Brief

- US Forest Service (USFS) staff presented information on the [USFS' Designation by Prescription \(DxP\) practices](#) for identifying trees to either leave and/or remove as part of forest restoration. USFS also presented the [Reynolds Creek restoration project](#) as an example USFS DxP process for variable density thinning in natural stands using GTR 220 and GTR 237 guidelines.
- ACCG agreed by consensus to submit a letter of support for the Power Fire Culvert Improvement and Erosion Control project categorical exclusion ([scoping letter](#), [maps](#), [request for support letter](#), [draft letter of support](#)).
- A capacity assessment sub-group will complete a capacity / needs assessment for the ACCG. The assessment will guide the implementation of the California Natural Resources Agency/ California Department of Conservation's Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Program.
- Consensus Building Institute (CBI) will work with a communications sub-group (based on the Admin Work Group [WG] members, other interested ACCG members, and ACCG member organizations' public affairs officers [PAOs]) to develop a Communication Plan for the ACCG to consider.
- The Strategic Landscape Assessment Work Group (SLAWG) is seeking fuels reduction project information for its project mapper tool. Regine will send out more detailed instructions on how ACCG members can provide project data to SLAWG for the project mapping tool.
- The [Monitoring WG](#) is developing the 5-year ecological indicator report required for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) (due December 2019). Those interested in the ACCG CFLR 5-Year Ecological Indicator Report can contact Becky Estes for more information. Becky is updating the Monitoring WG email list. Those who want to remain on the list, need to contact Becky (cc Regine).
- Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions (CHIPS) is close to finalizing a subcontract with CBI to ensure continued facilitation services. USFS will begin to develop a new interagency agreement in the new fiscal year. USFS, CHIPS, and Foothill Conservancy are also exploring potential use of remaining funds for CHIPS administrative support.

## Action Items

Actions	Responsible Parties
Finalize the draft letter of support and submit it on behalf of the ACCG.	Regine Miller
Work with Ben, Steve W, Robin, and Monte to draft responses to the RFFC assessment due September 27.	Regine Miller
Work with Michael Pickard to send out more detailed instructions on how ACCG members can provide project data to SLAWG for the project mapping tool.	Regine Miller
Work with CHIPS to research options for more centralized meeting locations for future meetings.	CBI
Add Reynolds Creek or other DxP site as a potential field trip site.	CBI
Work with the Admin WG to coordinate Communication Plan development meetings.	CBI

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## Modification and/or approval of agenda and June 2019 Meeting Summary.

There were minor modifications to the agenda (i.e., presenters) before being adopted as final. Due to power outage and time constraints, the mutual gains approach training module was postponed to the next general meeting.

There was one change to the July meeting summary regarding the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) National Coordinator discussion. An ACCG member clarified that CFLRP and federal agencies have more complex challenges conducting surveys (e.g., due to Paper Reduction Act requirements and other review/approval processes); however, collaboratives like the ACCG are not subject to the same requirements. Per this clarifying edit, the summary was adopted as final and is to be posted on website.

## Presentations, Discussions and Business

### Designation by Prescription

Brian McCrory, USFS Stanislaus National Forest Contracting Manager, presented information on the [USFS' Designation by Prescription \(DxP\) practices](#) for identifying trees to either leave and/or remove as part of forest restoration. Key takeaways included:

- **USFS' DxP Approach is a blend of standard DxP and DxD.** The standard DxP method is based on what the area should look like after timber harvest, whereas another similar method – Designation by Description (DxD) – identifies trees for removal based on verifiable/measurable characteristics after removal (e.g., distance from another tree). Standard DxP decision-making has greater latitude than DxD. USFS' DxP approach is a blend of the standard DxP approach and DxD – have measurable characteristics in DxP while retaining decision-making flexibility/latitude. This enables USFS to identify both what trees to remove, but also what trees should remain. For instance, USFS had the latitude to reevaluate trees marked for removal because conditions may have changed from the recent drought and associated high tree mortality.
- **Digital Prescription Guide (DPG).** In areas like Arizona, USFS uses DPG, a digital cutting guide, to aid DxP implementation. With LiDAR and other imaging data, DPG can help describe the spatial pattern and types of trees to be removed and augment a written cutting guide. It is not used to mark trees and does not assure contract compliance. USFS Region 5 currently does not use DPG.
- **Advantages of DxP.** DxP aligns strongly with the Forest Service Strategic Plan (efficient, cost-effective, and supports local economies). USFS' approach to DxP allows the contractors to use their expertise and discretion to select trees within the prescription to be cut to achieve the desired outcome. DxP also has substantial cost and time savings, particularly for timber sale preparation. For instance, in Fiscal Year 2018, Region 3 compared using individual tree marking (ITM) for approximately 20,000 acres and a combination of DxP, DPG, and ITM for another 20,000 acres; they found that incorporating DxP and DPG resulted in over \$750,000 in total cost savings. Part of the costs savings is due to the far fewer number of person days needed to designate a sale. However, these costs did not include administrative costs estimates.
- **Risks of DxP.** Risks and uncertainties include judgement calls on whether an individual tree should be cut, and complex designation guides increase potential for compliance disputes. This underscores the need for highly qualified contractors. There are also increased administrative

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costs for on-the-ground monitoring by the contract administrator (that have not yet been quantified).

- **Stewardship Contracts.** USFS currently implements DxP through stewardship contracts to foster successful DxP, such as selecting contractors based on past performance and experience, and requiring proposals to include a technical approach for DxP implementation and a quality control plan.
- **Reynolds Creek Ecological Restoration.** Brian referred participants to the [Reynolds Creek restoration project](#) as an example USFS DxP process for variable density thinning in natural stands using GTR 220 and GTR 237 guidelines. The prescription identified what types and size of trees to cut (e.g., intermediate trees with less than 50% crown) and the sequence (“cut this before that”). It is also an example of how USFS adjusted its treatments due to the impacts of climate change and drought.

## Discussion

- The group emphasized the need for skilled contractors to successfully implement DxP. Currently a professional forester works with contractors to identify which trees to remove, which helps more novice contractors develop experience and expertise. Several suggested USFS support contractor training in some manner, as seasoned contractors usually have more consistent and longer on-the-ground experience than most USFS staff.
- One ACCG member stated the Stanislaus NF generally has more complex prescriptions than other areas, and they have one of the most highly seasoned operators to help ensure effective treatments. He observed many of these seasoned operators are extremely dedicated to the quality of their work and take personal responsibility of harvest units.
- In response to a question related to tree marking to meet tree density / canopy cover requirements, Brian and Joe Sherlock, USFS, explained the prescription considers several factors (canopy, basal area, spacing, etc.) in its design to yield the canopy cover target. The marking crews are not responsible for those decisions.
- The group discussed how crews still need to “walk the ground” before any tree removal (even if they do not mark trees) to inform/confirm prescription applications (e.g., confirm live vs. dead crowns).
- Brian reiterated that the USFS currently does not have estimates for administrative costs associated with DxP and/or DPG applications. An ACCG member said there may be opportunity costs associated with these methods that should be considered. Another ACCG member added to also consider DxP and DPG applications are relatively new and will become more efficient with time.
- In response to a question regarding DPG and treatment boundaries, Brian explained that Region 5 currently does not have a policy for using digital or virtual boundaries; USFS still marks the boundaries using standard methods. An ACCG member suggested conducting a few DPG trials using virtual boundaries.
- ACCG members posed several questions related to the Reynolds Creek prescription application. Brian caveated that the PowerPoint presentation does not capture the nuanced decisions and judgment calls that occurred to achieve the desired outcomes of the prescription.
- There was a suggestion for a potential field trip to Reynolds Creek or other areas that will be harvested soon.

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- The group discussed climate change considerations and the application of GTR 220. ACCG members shared concerns that future extreme droughts may lead to high tree mortality and fuels build-up susceptible to wildfire (as experienced in the Southern Sierra). An ACCG member mentioned a paper documenting measurable differences in wildfire burning intensity for treated areas.

## **Next Steps**

CBI will note Reynolds Creek as a potential field trip site.

## **Power Fire Culvert Improvement and Erosion Control Project**

Rick Hopson, USFS Amador District, and Rich Farrington, Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority (UMRWA), presented the Power Fire Project seeking full ACCG consensus support ([scoping letter](#), [maps](#), [request for support letter](#), [draft letter of support](#)). The ACCG had agreed to submit a letter of support last year for the project's funding; this request is for the project's implementation (support for the description of the PA and design criteria). At its July 24 meeting, the ACCG Planning Work Group recommended the ACCG consider the project for full consensus.

The project identifies 92 culvert and stream crossing sites for maintenance and reconstruction. The project aims to protect aquatic resources and reduce erosion and sedimentation into tributaries to the North Fork Mokelumne by replacing undersized and plugged culverts and providing other types of drainage structures. The project also aims to reduce the likelihood of fill failures and road erosion and keep roads accessible. Scoping is in progress, and USFS proposes the project qualifies for Categorical Exclusion from Category 18.

## **Discussion**

- Participants asked about previous ACCG discussions related to the project. Rich Farrington notified ACCG on 10/24/18 & Planning WG on 11/18/18, he presented slideshow to the full ACCG 1/16/19, and Rick Hopson proposed to Planning WG 7/24/19 (received support from all presentations).
- In response to a question related to incorporating aquatic habitats into the project design, Rick said the preliminary planning discussions considered Aquatic Life Passages (ALPs); however, this would have affected needed fish passage.

## **Next Steps**

The ACCG agreed by consensus to submit a letter of support for the project. Regine Miller, the ACCG Administrator, will finalize the draft letter of support and submit it on behalf of the ACCG.

## **UPDATES**

### **Admin Work Group Update**

#### **Contract Updates**

Regine Miller shared that CHIPS is close to finalizing the subcontract with CBI for facilitation and conflict resolution under a modified USFS-CHIPS contract. The contract will cover \$50,000 for both CBI and CHIPS services through August 2020 (although those funds are unlikely to cover services through that full time period). Robin Wall, USFS, stated that in October with the new fiscal year, USFS will begin to

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develop a new interagency agreement with US Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution Udall Foundation. Tania Carlone, CBI and ACCG Lead Facilitator, explained the Admin WG recommended distributing facilitation services to optimize funding – Tania Carlone will facilitate Planning WG meetings and Stephanie Horii, CBI, will facilitate the ACCG general meetings; both facilitators will coordinate with Regine and participate in the Admin WG meetings. CHIPS is also working with the Foothill Conservancy and USFS to explore utilizing remaining funds for administrative services from a Foothill Conservancy-USFS contract.

## Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Program Assessment

Regine also informed the group of an assessment by the Watershed Research and Training Center. The purpose of the assessment is to understand the current capacity, needs, and future interests of organizations, collaboratives, and tribes participating in forest and fire management in California to help guide the implementation of the California Natural Resources Agency/ California Department of Conservation's Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Program. Responses are due September 27. The Center requested one entity to submit responses on behalf of the full collaborative. The ACCG Admin Work Group had suggested, and the full ACCG agreed, to form a small sub-group to submit responses on behalf of the ACCG.

## Communication Plan

Stephanie Horii explained that one of the actions from the [Collaborative Engagement Strategy](#) is to develop a comprehensive outreach, communications and engagement plan. CBI drafted an initial communication plan outline and will work with the ACCG to further develop the document. The Admin WG recommended that Admin WG members could meet to work on the Communication Plan, and any other ACCG members are welcome to join those discussions (estimating about four meetings).

ACCG members recommended the Communication Plan address several issues and topics, including key messaging and communication strategies (clear impacts like wildfire, less overt impacts like climate change, benefits of the all lands approach, etc.) and how the ACCG could implement the communication plan in the long term after CFLR funding. Participants suggested engaging important stakeholders and potential partners who have been absent from ACCG discussions, understanding why they have been absent, and exploring options for how they may participate going forward (e.g., if facing competing priorities, provide information they need to demonstrate value to their leadership). Participants also recommended inviting ACCG organizations' public affairs officers into the discussions (e.g., USFS, BLM, EBMUD, etc.).

## **Next Steps**

Regine will work with Ben, Steve W, Robin, and Monte to draft responses to the RFFC assessment due September 27.

CBI will work with the Admin WG (interested Admin WG members include Susan Holper) to coordinate Communication Plan development meetings.

## **Planning Work Group Update**

### Project Development and Approval Process

Tania Carlone shared that the Planning WG continues to refine the process for developing and approving projects. The Planning WG has been working with a list of management actions that is intended to help expedite project proposals for activities that stakeholders widely support ("green light topics") and that

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are often under tight deadlines to seek funding. The list also helps project planners identify when they should engage the ACCG to discuss controversial activities (“yellow light” and “red light” topics), if they seek ACCG support.

## Calaveras Ranger District

Joe Aragon, USFS Calaveras District Ranger, shared that work is underway for the Hemlock Project in the Black Springs area; work is beginning in the Fore project area. There is a restoration project covering similar areas as the Hemlock Project (e.g., Cabbage Patch), but through different funding under a master stewardship agreement among UMRWA, USFS, and Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC).

Ray Cablayan, USFS, provided an overview of the recent Moving Towards Resiliency within the Mokelumne to Kings River (MOTOR M2K) project public meeting on August 12. Attendees engaged in table-top discussions on specific issues including public participation, herbicide use, salvage logging, and other sideboards / management considerations. Based on attendees’ input, the USFS is considering adjusting the MOTOR M2K schedule to postpone scoping until after the Sequoia and Sierra Forest Plan public comment period ends (September 26).

Several ACCG members shared questions and concerns about the MOTOR M2K process (e.g., Are there other approaches to achieve the same objectives in a less controversial way? Can USFS extend the MOTOR M2K scoping period out further to incorporate important resources like LiDAR data and Potential Operational Delineations [PODs] analysis and to allow stakeholders more time to review and provide more substantive input? Does USFS have the capacity for implementation?). An ACCG member underscored the benefits for collaborative discussions up front to reduce risks of conflict, litigations, etc. later in the process, expressing concerns that a truncated process could undermine the collaborative efforts the ACCG has developed over the years. The ACCG Planning WG will continue to work with USFS to discuss the MOTOR M2K project in greater depth.

## Amador Ranger District

Rick Hopson announced the USFS will have timber offerings from the Scottiago project by the end of the fiscal year. The USFS is waiting on the vegetation thinning decision for the Power Fire project (still undergoing tribal consultation). USFS will hold a Callegat field trip following the regularly scheduled Planning WG meeting on August 28 to see GTR 220 fuels reduction activities and a skyline harvest unit. An ACCG member requested field trip schedules with more advanced notice.

## Strategic Landscape Assessment Work Group (SLAWG)

Megan Layhee, Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC), shared an update on the SLAWG’s progress developing a mapping tool of existing and planned projects (that will help identify areas for future ACCG projects). She shared pilot maps that enable anyone to select attributes (layers) that present information that is useful for them (must use Adobe Reader) (refer to images below).



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projects are in the NEPA process (e.g., completed the NEPA process but have not transitioned into implementation or received funding).

## Meeting Locations

The group briefly discussed holding future meetings in a more centralized location (e.g., Jackson or San Andreas) to reduce transportation times for many of the attendees. Exceptions include when the meeting is paired with a field trip. Planning WG meetings will offer a call-in phone number, but the group underscored participating in person at these meetings is more ideal for substantive discussion.

## Next Steps

CBI will work with CHIPS to research options for more centralized meeting locations for future meetings.

Regine will send out more detailed instructions on how ACCG members can provide project data to SLAWG for the project mapping tool.

## **Monitoring Work Group Update**

Gwen Starrett, Monitoring Work Group, shared updates on recent [Monitoring WG activities](#), work to develop the 5-year ecological indicator report required for CFLR (due December 2019). This entails quantifying progress to achieve desired conditions related to watershed condition, fire regimes, wildlife habitat, and invasive species. The Monitoring WG is also updating its roles and functions for the ACCG MOA update.

## Next Steps

Those interested in the ACCG CFLR 5-Year Ecological Indicator Report can contact Becky Estes for more information.

Becky is updating the Monitoring WG email list. Those who want to remain on the list, need to contact Becky (cc Regine).

## **Roundtable Updates**

**Monte Kawahara / Liz Meyer-Shields:** Much of the South Fork Mokelumne River project has been completed. Final work includes connecting treated areas with CAL FIRE priority areas. The Lily Gap Forest Health Project contract with SNC is complete. BLM's portion of the PG&E Tiger Creek project Environmental Assessment (EA) decision will be signed in the near term. BLM is seeking permits for additional hazard tree removal in Amador and Calaveras counties. Wildland Fire Community Assistance Program applications through BLM's Good Neighbor Authority program closed the previous week; BLM plans to evaluate proposals and issue decisions by the end of the fiscal year.

**Joe Aragon:** Arnold-Avery pre-submission proposal sent to SNC. USFS conducted a field trip of the Hemlock project sites for the UMRWA Board in July to show before and after treatment effects.

**Gwen Starrett:** The EA process for Three Meadows continues. Part of the analysis will include river surveys for nine weeks. Gwen continues work on fuels reduction and raising participation and awareness. The winter brought in a lot of sediment into the meadows area.

**Ben Solvesky:** Although not in the ACCG landscape, Caples Creek Restoration Project implementation continues (project covers approximately 8,800 acres) – recent major fuels reduction occurred over six days with the support of volunteers to rake organic material and prepare for prescribed fire treatments.

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**Katherine Evatt:** Shane Dante is a new employee with the Foothill Conservancy who will attend ACCG meetings.

**Rich Farrington:** UMRWA continues to administer contracts for fuels reduction work for the Hemlock project. Educating the public on the issues and needs for this work continues to be a challenge.

**Ray Cablayan:** Relatively quiet fire season thus far. USFS crews are prepping for burning fuels in the fall. During the week prior, Groveland conducted a night burn covering approximately 150 acres in one evening (worked with local resorts to develop buy-in and support for conducting the controlled burns); serves as example of another tool for burning fuels safely and effectively.

**Steve Brink:** Expect a bill (Feinstein and Gaines) for additional forest management streamlining to be introduced in the coming month.

**Robin Wall:** USFS will continue to work with CBI, USIECR, CHIPS, and Foothill Conservancy to finalize facilitation / administration contracts to support the ACCG.

**John Heissenbuttel:** Amador Fire Safe Council (FSC) actively implementing fuel breaks for metro line, State Parks, BLM, and private lands. Three projects are out to bid for private land treatments with high interest (18 interested contractors attended field tour). Possible spotted owl survey for the Tiger Creek area (if implementation grant received). FSC also working with CALFIRE and Amador Fire Protection District to evaluate / update evacuation route maps for the county.

**David Griffith:** The Alpine Biomass Collaborative (ABC) is working with High Sierra Community Energy Development Corporation to conduct a scoping study evaluating options for best utilizing excess biomass in the county. ABC also plans to finalize its collaborative MOA in the fall.

**Rick Hopson:** USFS close to finalizing the Power Fire project proposed action; Rick expressed his gratitude for the ACCG's input. USFS and CHIPS continue efforts to apply for Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) funding and SNC funding (will continue to keep ACCG updated). USFS Pacific Southwest (PSW) is conducting an aquatic species eDNA survey in the area. USFS PSW and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) awarded funding to the Mountain Counties Water Resources Association to develop fuels reduction and biomass management strategies as part of Northern California Forests and Watersheds grant program (partnership among Eldorado NF, Lassen NF, USFS PSW, and NFWF). The District will hire a recreation officer and hired a new forester and administrative assistant clerk.

**Regine Miller:** CHIPS is close to completing the first phase of the South Fork Mokelumne project; Phase 3 is under contract, and CHIPS expects to release an RFP in the coming months. CHIPS is working on WCB proposal for treating about 2400 acres in the Power Fire and Power Fire nexus area. CHIPS is partnering with USFS and UMRWA for the West Calaveras Thinning Fuels Work Project (950 acres of treatment). CHIPS, USFS, and UMRWA are partners for the View 88 Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project application to SNC (about 900 acres of mostly roadside clearing). CHIPS received SNC funding to support workforce development for Tribes; that work is in its beginning phases. CHIPS is also considering the Sierra Nevada Alliance's Forestry Fellowship program (aimed to build local and regional capacity) for a full-time fellow for one year (ACCG parties welcome to partner with CHIPS). Field crews are working in areas like East Meadow and Highway 88.

**Tim Tate:** Sierra Pacific Industries' (SPI) operating season is going well thus far. SPI consolidated its logging infrastructure this year to better align with the trucking infrastructure. As part of SPI's effort to increase pace and scale related to fuels reduction, Tim is finding that about one-third of the volume being harvested in his area is from implementation projects. He expects that trend will continue for about 3-5 years until the new matrix of treatments have established on the landscape.

**John Buckley / Megan Layhee:** Megan will be leaving CSERC in August. Joe Aragon will be the new liaison between the Planning WG and SLAWG.

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## Closing

**Next General Meeting:** September 18 meeting will be at West Point.

## Meeting Participants

First	Last	Affiliation	Hours	Miles
Ben	Slovesky	Sierra Forest Legacy	6	60
Brian	McCrary	USFS - Stanislaus NF	2	40
David	Griffith	Alpine Biomass Collaborative	7	120
Elizabeth	Meyer-Shields	Bureau of Land Management	4	30
Gerald	Schwartz	East Bay Municipal Utility District	4	100
Gwen	Starrett	Amador Resident	.	.
Jan	Bray	AFFC/Cal Am Team	4	12
Joe	Aragon	USFS - Stanislaus NF, Calaveras Ranger District	4	.
Joe	Sherlock	USFS	.	.
John	Buckley	Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, Yosemite-Stanislaus Solutions	6	.
John	Heissenbuttel	Cal Am, Amador FSC	4	30
Josh	Sjostrom	Bureau of Land Management	4	30
Katherine	Evatt	Foothill Conservancy	4	26
Megan	Layhee	Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center	5	120
Monte	Kawahara	Bureau of Land Management	4	30
Pat	McGreevy	Cal-Am	0	40
Ray	Cablaysan	USFS - Stanislaus NF, Calaveras Ranger District	6	100
Rich	Farrington	Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority	4	30
Rick	Hopson	USFS - ENF, Amador Ranger District	4	30
Robin	Wall	USFS - ENF, Amador Ranger District	6	50
Shane	Dante	Foothill Conservancy	0.2	3
Steve	Brink	California Forestry Association	5	92
Steve	Wilensky	CHIPS	5	50
Susan	McMorris	Blue Mountain Community Renewal Council	4.5	55
Tim	Tate	Sierra Pacific Industries	3	5
Tony	Valdes	Foothill Conservancy	6	60
Tania	Carlone	Consensus Building Institute	8	180
Stephanie	Horii	Consensus Building Institute	6	80