

**Amador Calaveras Consensus Group; Dinkey Collaborative; Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions**

GETTING TO SCALE ON THE SIERRA AND STANISLAUS NATIONAL FORESTS WITH COLLABORATIVES

October 21, 2019

Calaveras County Library, San Andreas Central Branch

1299 Gold Hunter Road, San Andreas, CA 95249

**Summary**

USFS Region 5 leadership convened a meeting organized by the Sierra Institute for Community and Environment to discuss the MotorM2K project with participants from Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions, Amador Calaveras Consensus Group, the Dinkey Collaborative, and staff from the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forest.

**Participants**

Barnie Gyant – Deputy Regional Forester

Alan Olson – Acting Deputy Regional Forester

Beth Martinez – Sierra Forest Acting Deputy

Michael Jow – Co-Project lead

Katie W. – USFS Co-Project lead

Sarah L. – USFS

Rich Farrington – UMRWA

Katherine Evatt – Foothill Conservancy

John Buckley – YSS

Patrick Koepele - YSS

Judi Tapia, Planner – Sierra National Forest

Randy Hanvelt – CSEDD

John H.

Craig Thomas – Fire Learning Network

Chris Trott – YSS

Al Wilson

Juliana Birkhoff – Facilitator

Sue Britting – Sierra Forest Legacy

Andy Fristensky – Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Steve Haze – Sierra Resource Conservation District

Darren Mahr – Forester, Sierra Forest Products

Robert Dean – Calaveras County RCD

Kim Sorini-Wilson – Ranger, Sierra National Forest

Michael Pickard – Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Tim Tate – Sierra Pacific Industries

Joe Aragon – Calaveras Ranger District

John Amodio – YSS

Sue Holper – ACCG, resident

Ray Cablayan – District Ranger

Steve Wilensky – CHIPS

Jim Junette – District Ranger

Jack Garamondi - ACCG

Jonathan Kusel – Sierra Institute

Dov Weinman – Sierra Institute

**Opening**

Jonathan Kusel welcomed participants and explained the role of Sierra Institute. Supported by Region 5 for the Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement project (SCALE), Sierra Institute identified Motor M2K project for inclusion in the SCALE meeting on November 5th and 6th. In discussion with potential panel participants for the SCALE meeting, Sierra Institute staff learned of significant issues, if not problems, with the project. Steve Wilensky and Jonathan had several conversations with Deputy Regional Forester Barnie Gyant, who agreed to convene and participate in this meeting. Barnie thanked everyone for the willingness to meet on short notice and acknowledged that he’d heard an array of different things about the project. It’s an important opportunity to sit together to discuss concerns with the collaborative process and to establish a path forward. Jonathan explained the importance of hear everyone’s perspective and asked each participant to share their objectives for the meeting. Participants stated the following objectives:

* To increase pace and scale through collaborative efforts
* To gain a better understanding for everyone’s perspective
* To come to a common direction or agreed upon pathway forward
* To increase work on private lands
* To listen in order to facilitate next conversations
* To develop a deeper understanding of NEPA with regards to increased scale
* To understand what this process is going to look like
* To develop an interface between collaborative groups toward common agreements.
* To better understand how to increase pace and scale
* To find a way to address issues of local engagement and develop resolution to checkerboard ownership?
* To understand how to work within collaborative groups.
* To recognize different approaches that won’t undermine the work of collaboratives.
* To address concerns of keeping communities safe and supplying materials to industry.
* To design projects that meet the capacity of the Forest Service.
* To understand what scale is the best fit for the collaboratives.
* To set the discussion on a positive course and address issues of bottom-up collaboration.
* To address concerns about climate change and catastrophic wildfire.
* To network and develop relationships
* To identify concerns and understand how team leaders can approach this process.
* To discuss trust before discussing the project so we can move forward together.

**Collaboration and Trust Building**

Facilitators guided a discussion on trust building and finding a common pathway toward a more collaborative process. Participants felt collaborative steps were skipped in the pursuit of increasing scale and that the Forest Service had neglected building on past successful work. Trust has decreased because the environmental community has felt that past Forest Service projects have ignored input, but participants also mentioned that residual bitterness can’t become an obstacle to fulfilling their objectives for the landscape. Measuring performance is one mechanism to building trust if entities agree upon their respective roles and then evaluate outcomes – participants agreed that a single NEPA decision for 1.5 million acres with little room for evaluation feels like a faulty approach. Collaborative members emphasized the high likelihood for this project to end in litigation. Wanting to feel like their efforts are meaningful and acknowledged in Forest Service projects, participants emphasized the issue of trust and the desire to focus on areas of agreement before moving forward.

Michael Jow mentioned that the Forest Service hadn’t created specific design features – adding that they had identified the project area for where they would use conditioned-based NEPA. As the Forest Service continued to develop project specifics, they wanted the respective collaboratives to provide input on project components. With the acknowledgement that the Forest Service is now fully hearing the concerns of the collaboratives, participants asked what vehicles or processes would guide the process moving forward. Additionally, participants asked Barnie Gyant about the absence of the Forest Service project leads and Barnie mentioned he would be having a candid conversation with the two forest supervisors about the outcomes from the meeting’s discussions.

Michael acknowledged the FS didn’t fully understand the collaboratives’ processes and dynamics. After hearing about past successes on a smaller scale, Katie added that the collaboratives could have great input on how to extrapolate and implement on larger scales and that these discussions might suggest an entirely new role out of this project. She also suggested that the core of the conditions-based NEPA could be developed with the collaboratives. Judi Tapia mentioned that she’s heard about the discomfort with the top-down approach and how it hasn’t felt organic to collaborative groups. Forest Service staff agreed that more communication was needed, and that actively listening to collaboratives will allow their teams to pause and understand how they might redevelop the project. There’s a learning curve to understanding how collaboratives work and learning this collaborative language may be an important step forward. There was mention of a “reboot” for the landscape project. Juliana Birkhoff stated that some of the frustration has stemmed from past meetings with Forest Service staff that has seemingly been ignored. Collaborative members feel they have the same amount of information that they had six months ago and are frustrated that the FS seems disinclined to respond to past input.

**Areas of Agreement**

Jonathan asked collaborative members to work with FS staff to identify agreed-upon barriers to pace and scale. John Buckley asked if there was logic in developing one project for both national forests. Collaborative members wanted to reach a level of consensus on whether or not condition-based NEPA fits or if it’s logical to look at a programmatic plan to streamline NEPA processes. Participants suggested advantages to working with the collaboratives to at least split up the two forests, and YSS had discussed alternative approaches that include 1) imitating the fast-paced NEPA done for Rim Fire salvage and reforestation, 2) long-term programmatic NEPA documents or an EIS with site specific CEs or EAs for projects, or 3) a modified conditions-based approached of a five-year plan (and treatment of 40,000 acres per year) with an evaluation of the results.

Participants discussed the differences between landscapes and jurisdictions, working to find agreement about what large landscape scale might look like. Collaborative members emphasized that landscape was more adequately reflected in their collaborative footprints and some wondered if the scale of NEPA should be limited by capacity instead of jurisdictional boundaries. Budget was also highlighted as a major barrier to landscape scale NEPA processes, and participants questioned where the budget would come from for a 1.5-million acre project area.

Participants shared their fears and the urgent need to reduce forest fuels, protect the public, and restore forest and watershed health. Conifer forests are unnaturally dense, ladder fuels have not had frequent wildfires, and meadows and riparian areas need restorative treatments. Participants also agreed that the objective is to work together to increase pace and scale across ownership boundaries to reduce catastrophic fire and move toward resilient forests. One participant mentioned that collaboratives might not have completely defined goals in numeric terms our goals (acres treated, wildlife habitat), and a next step might be to agree on what they want to achieve and what it might cost. Including socioeconomic monitoring would allow collaboratives to better understand the needs of local communities.

Outcome and Next Steps

The Forest Service acknowledged MotorM2K was a bold attempt at a new approach. The Forest Service mentioned they must complete required surveys regardless of NEPA type, and asked the collaboratives how they might help identify priority areas. Barnie commended project leads for considering the larger landscape and agreed it would benefit the two forests for the collaboratives to identify focal areas within their footprints in order to best select specific NEPA tools to fit the scale and type of projects.

Participants acknowledged the Forest Service had presented a challenge. The Forest Service tasked each collaborative to identify focal areas with mixed treatments and balanced approaches that would dramatically increase treatment areas and be implemented faster than the average large landscape NEPA process. Collaboratives will report back to the Forest Supervisors and a suite of NEPA tools will be analyzed based on input from the collaboratives. Some collaborative members expressed concern with the time it will take to identify focal areas – the collaboratives are in different stages of prioritizing. Barnie suggested that iterative feedback between the collaboratives and the Forest Service remain on a somewhat flexible schedule, but there was general agreement that a key next step was groups identifying focal areas to address priorities at landscape scale.

Multiple participants commended the Forest Service for actively listening and responding to the concerns brought before them. Katie and Michael were commended for representing the project and, Barnie reiterated that the Forest Service hopes to maintain the spirit of collaboration as this re-booted project progresses. Participants generally expressed witnessing people being heard and feeling a certain degree of coming together between the collaboratives and Forest Service staff.

The MotorM2K meeting scheduled for Monday, October 28th will be canceled and notifications will be sent out.