**Scottiago Field Trip**

The ACCG Planning Work Group hosted a field trip in the Scottiago Forest Health Project area exploring how to mechanically increase forest complexity and spotted owl habitat quality in uniform stands. Field trip participants visited two commercial thinning sites in spotted owl Home Range Core Areas that were treated under the CASPO guidelines (GTR 133, spotted owl strategy in place from 1992-2001). Units in these areas were previously treated with dbh limits in the low-to mid-20" range within the past 20 years. Under CASPO prescriptions, most of the trees less than 20" dbh were removed, and the residual trees are now fairly evenly spaced. Eventually the goal is to provide fire and climate resilient high-quality nesting and roosting habitat where appropriate in the project area.

Several forest management experts, including USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station ecologists Malcolm North and John Keane, attended to provide their insights on management approaches. Key takeaways included:

* **Grow tall trees in clumps ASAP**. To create suitable habitat for spotted owls, aim to have 20-30% canopy cover of large trees within a stand.
* **Canopy cover**. Spotted owls need canopy cover of *large (dbh or height?)* trees. Avoid high canopy cover of *ladder* fuels.
* **Pair clumps with gaps**. When creating “clumps” of tree stands, consider the spacing/gaps as well. Gaps are especially important for large clumps to allow for roots to expand.
* **Use water availability/soil quality as guide**. Wetter areas can support larger/denser clumps; gaps between trees can be as small as 6-8 feet (approximately 12 feet but could be as small as 6 feet). For drier areas, aim to create 12-15 foot spacing between intermediate-sized trees. After thinning ladder fuels and intermediate-sized trees, thin white fir and cedar co-dominants in *drier* areas; some co-dominant thinning may be needed in wetter areas.
* **Prey availability**. Small mammal (e.g., woodrat) abundance and availability also affects the quality of habitat for spotted owls. Gaps important to increase shrub and understory habitat to for small mammal to improve owl foraging. Woodrat 4K elevation upper range. Only relevant to lower elevation forest service lands. Upper elevation most prevalent prey flying squirrels.
* **Thinning around existing tree groups.** If the stand is in a good spot, thin around the clumps. If the stand is in poor/thin soil, create gaps.
* **Prepare future owl habitat.** Think beyond protecting existing protected activity centers (PACs). Explore opportunities to create new, high-quality habitat (that is resilient to future conditions).
* **Allow fire to burn large dbh areas**. Mechanical thinning treatments are limited for areas dominated by large dbh trees (i.e., cannot remove trees with >30” dbh). Prescribed fire may be an option in these areas.
* **Rely on multiple rounds of experts to mark trees.** After trained crews initially mark trees for thinning, bring in experts (e.g., wildlife biologists and local silviculturists) on site to check and provide recommendations.
* **Wildfire threats.** Analyze likely direction of wildfires when deciding on a thinning strategy. Perhaps create larger gaps in these areas.
* **Future field trips.** Perhaps visit the Callecat project site where GTR 220 was used for the first time. Tea Kettle experimental forest (GTR 220- impacts of climate change).
* **Thoughts on Purpose of field trip:** to inform future projects. What are the implications of utilizing DxP to achieve vertical and horizontal heterogeneity.