

Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

Planning Work Group Meeting Summary, June 26, 2019, Pioneer, CA

Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute

Meeting Brief

The Planning Work Group (WG):

- Supported the Strategic Landscape Assessment Work Group (SLAWG) moving forward with its short-term goal to develop a mapping tool of existing and planned projects to help identify areas for future projects.
- Supported integrated discussions between SLAWG and the Planning WG to ensure SLAWG outputs meet ACCG needs.
- Encouraged SLAWG to coordinate with the Monitoring WG.
- Briefly discussed how project proponents might utilize a “zones of agreement” document to develop their project development and ACCG engagement strategy.
- Revised project development and engagement flowchart.
- Participated in field trip of the Scottiago Forest Health Project area exploring management options for mechanically increasing forest complexity and spotted owl habitat quality.

Action Items

Actions	Point Person(s)
Share Planning WG input back to SLAWG.	Megan Layhee
Connect with the Monitoring WG to coordinate with SLAWG activities.	Megan Layhee
Ask Lindsay Buchanan whether the USFS DC Office knows of good mapping and landscape-scale assessment tool examples.	CBI
Review the ACCG MOA and offer suggested updates/revisions for the role and responsibilities of the Planning Group	All (Tania will distribute MOA)
Update project development flowchart per Planning WG discussion	CBI

Summary

Strategic Landscape Assessment Work Group (SLAWG) Draft Proposal

Megan Layhee, CSERC and SLAWG-Planning WG liaison, presented the work group’s proposed short- and long-term goals for Planning WG consideration [[Draft Proposal](#)].

- **Short-Term Goal – Mapping Tool.** Develop a mapping tool of existing and planned projects to help identify areas for future projects. SLAWG is currently focused on creating a pdf of fuels reduction projects to share at the July 24 Planning WG meeting. The group then plans to add ACCG-related projects. SLAWG invites input on how best to visually present the data.
- **Long Term Goal – Landscape-Scale Assessment.** Create a new, enhance an existing, or fund development of a landscape-scale assessment for the ACCG. SLAWG has been exploring various concept examples and data sources with ACCG members and partners for input on data management strategies, framework, etc.
- **Tool(s) Accessibility.** SLAWG has also been considering different data platforms to ultimately make these tools available to the full ACCG (e.g., ArcOnline webmap).

Megan emphasized that SLAWG wishes to collaboratively work with the Planning Group as SLAWG moves forward to ensure the strategic assessment and other tool(s) align with ACCG’s needs.

Discussion

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- The Planning WG supported SLAWG moving forward with developing a “pilot” map of fuels reduction projects for the group to review at its next meeting.
- Members supported continued conversations with the Planning Group (e.g., the tools’ purpose and how they will be used) as SLAWG develops/refines the tools. For example, Rich Farrington, UMRWA, recommended the group further discuss how to determine / define vulnerabilities and priorities. Robin Wall, USFS, flagged a future discussion on associated costs, timelines, and funding sources to develop/maintain these tools (e.g., creating georeference PDFs can be free; ArcOnline requires paying for an account).
- Several members reemphasized SLAWG continue to work with partners and analyze existing information sources (e.g., project info mapping by CAL FIRE, Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI), Pacific Gas & Electric, fire safe councils, USFS DC office). Tania Carlone, CBI, suggested asking Lindsay Buchanan, USFS (who will guest speak at the July 17 General meeting), whether the USFS DC Office knows of good tool examples.
- Correction to the SLAWG proposal document: *Fall River Resource Conservation District* (member of Burney Hat Creek Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration [CFLR]) is using the 34 North analysis tool.
- Several members encouraged SLAWG to work closely with the Monitoring WG to include monitoring results into the mapping tool. The Monitoring WG’s next meeting is July 10.

Collaborative Engagement Strategy: ACCG Project Development / Approval Process and Future Priorities

Tania Carlone, CBI, reviewed the finalized [Collaborative Engagement Strategy](#) strategic elements (SE) and priority actions for the Planning WG, including:

- **SE: 1, Action #2: Refine governance.** Planning WG members are to review the ACCG MOA and offer suggested updates/revisions for the role and responsibilities of the Planning Group.
- **SE 2, Action #4: Project evaluation tool.** Using the an [example list of project actions](#) (originally developed by the Sierra Forest Legacy (SFL) and presented to in 2018), the Planning WG will continue its discussions to identify “zones of agreement” and protocols for how to proceed with each category.
- **SE 3, Action #1: Project development flowchart.** The Planning WG provided input on the draft [project development flowchart](#) (summarized below)
- **SE 3, Actions #2-3: Landscape vision work.** Currently underway with SLAWG efforts.
- **SE 4: Education and outreach.** Admin WG will lead these efforts, seeking Planning Group input.

Tania oriented the group to the revised draft flowchart for project proponents to request support from the ACCG. She noted that project proponents would have a full project guidance package that would include information like the [ACCG principles and policies](#) background, [process flowchart](#), [endorsement guidelines](#), “zones of agreement” document (still in development), and [submission form](#).

Discussion

- The Planning Group did not share any comments on the Engagement Strategy document.
- Members shared suggested edits for project development flowchart; Tania made changes in real time. Revisions included:
 - **Collect Information.** Emphasize proponents should consult the “zones of agreement” document

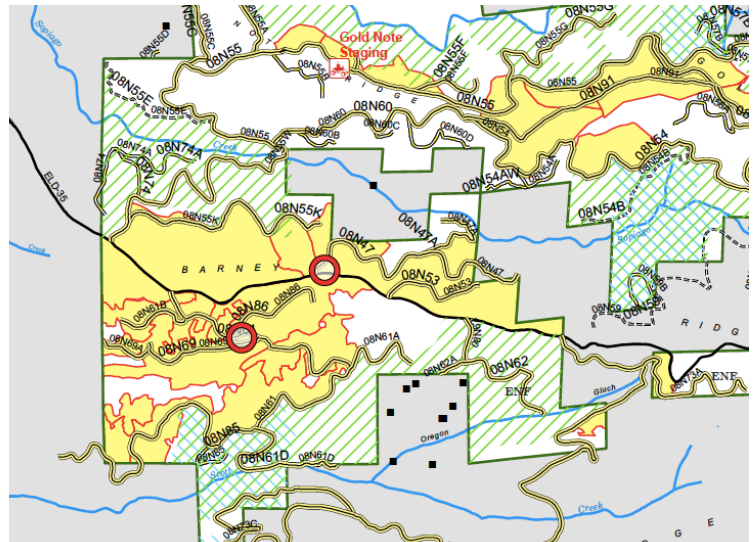
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- **Planning WG Engagement.** Clarify that the Planning WG will convey to the Admin WG to place the project proposal on the general meeting agenda. Clarify that individual ACCG members have the freedom to provide support or opposition for a project, regardless of whether the project receives ACCG consensus.
- **General Meeting Presentation.** Give members more advanced time to review materials (send the Wednesday before [1 week] rather than the Monday before).
- **ACCG Support.** Clarify to whom the ACCG will send the letter of Support.
- Ben Solvesky, SFL, emphasized that projects falling in the “green” zones of agreement (where there would be high ACCG support) should follow an expedited process. Several Planning WG members agreed; however, the protocol for that expedited process requires further discussion. The group agreed that activities in the “yellow” or “red” zones required Planning WG discussion.
- John Heissenbuttel shared concerns that many grant application short timeframes do not allow for project proponents to develop, present/deliberate, and revise proposals within the ACCG standard meeting schedule. Rick Hopson, USFS, suggested that the project proponent could present at the ACCG general meeting if that occurred before the next Planning WG meeting. Katherine reiterated the individual ACCG members can send in letters of support regardless of the ACCG meeting timeline.
- The group briefly considered other scheduling alternatives, including holding Planning WG meetings before the general meetings to allow proponents to present project proposals. Ray Cablayan reminded the group that the ACCG decided to hold Planning WG meetings after the general meetings to give the Planning WG adequate time to prepare for the next general meeting.

Scottiago Field Trip

The ACCG Planning Work Group hosted a field trip in the Scottiago Forest Health Project area on June 26, 2019 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 (HRCA) 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 create fire and climate resilient high-quality nesting, roosting and foraging 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 offer their insights on management approaches. A summary of the key themes discussed during the field trip are as follows. It is important to note that the below content does not reflect a consensus of the ACCG.

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- **Climate Change Implications for Scottiago stand Prescriptions** – GTR 220 prescriptions were tested in a Southern Sierra Forest (Dinkey Creek) and there was a large amount of tree mortality afterward. When asked why, M. North thought not enough trees were taken out.
- **“Clumps and Gaps”** stand structure is more beneficial over uniform spacing. Gaps are especially important for large clumps to allow for roots to expand and for fire protection. Tall, big trees in “wet” areas for clumps with tight crown closure benefit owl nesting. Make gaps around clumps that open the canopy, allow light in and accelerate growth of clump canopies. Gaps increase horizontal heterogeneity and habitat complexity by providing open areas, patches of shrubs, and areas for tree regeneration next to higher density clumps that owls need for protection from predators. In some cases, it may be necessary to remove trees greater than 30” DBH to create gaps. However, because >30 inch trees provide important owl habitat, gap placement should minimize larger tree removal whenever possible. Clumps could be 3 to 15 trees or so. Gaps could be as large as ¼ to ½ acre in size. Fire can add natural gaps by killing trees, which is acceptable. Gaps should be greater in number on dry, ridge and south slope sites, and fewer in wet sites.
- **Oaks** with cavities can be nesting habitat for owls. Oaks should be retained and gaps could be created next them to let in light so they don’t get shaded out by conifers. However, oaks could also be thinned around to increase light and left in clumps if it would improve future habitat for spotted owls.
- **Ground fire** is needed to reduce duff and eliminate ground fuels in clumps and gaps. Otherwise burning heavy ground fuels can damage clumps. Avoid high canopy cover of *ladder* fuels.
- **Restricting +30” tree cutting** can be a future problem if all the trees in a clump are over 30” and thinning is needed to grow the trees taller, increase canopy closure, and regenerate young replacement trees. Trees will not grow much or be able to reproduce.
- **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, and others) abundance and availability also affects the quality of habitat for spotted owls. Gaps are important to increase shrub and understory habitat to for some small mammals to improve owl foraging habitat. Woodrat upper range is about 4,000 feet elevation. Only relevant to lower elevation forest service lands. Upper elevation prey includes flying squirrels.
- **Thinning around existing tree groups.** If the stand is in a high quality growing site, thin around the clumps. If the stand is in poor/thin soil, creating gaps may increase forest health. Conifer regeneration in the gaps should be thinned by PCT and or fire to increase growth of understory stand and to prevent the creation of ladder fuels or to maintain open gap conditions.

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- **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. Consider creating larger gaps in places where wildfire threats are higher.
- **Future field trips.** Consider visiting the Callecatt project site where GTR 220 was used for the first time. Dinkey Creek is an example of GTR 220- prescriptions impacted by tree mortality.
- **Thoughts on Purpose of field trip:** to inform future projects. What are the implications of utilizing DxP (Designation by Prescription) to achieve vertical and horizontal heterogeneity.

Future Meetings

The next Planning Work Group meeting will be on July 24, 2019 at the Amador Ranger District in Pioneer.

Meeting Participants

(To be filled in before finalizing draft)

Name	Affiliation	Miles	Time
Rich Farrington	UMRWA		
Megan Layhee	CSERC	Phone	
Rick Hopson	USFS		
Robin Wall	USFS		
Ben Solvesky	SFL		
Gwen Starrett	Local Resident	NFWF Match	
Chuck Loffland	USFS		
Ray Cablayan	USFS		
Liz Gregg	CSERC		
Katherine Evatt	Foothill Conservancy	Phone	
Marc Young	USFS		
Craig Ostergaard	SPI		
Luke	SPI		
Matt	SPI		
Sarah			
Tracy			
John			
Tania Carlone	CBI		
Stephanie Horii	CBI		

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