

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

*General Meeting Notes, March 18, 2020, by phone*

## Meeting Brief

- In light of the coronavirus, the group met by phone for a 1-hour business meeting for work group and round table updates. There were no presentations or discussions conducted.

## Action Items

Actions	Responsible Parties
Distribute court filing for the California Vegetation Treatment Plan (VTP) program CEQA challenge.	Regine Miller

## Summary

### **Modification and/or approval of agenda and February 2020 Meeting Summary.**

There were no modifications to the agenda. The February General Meeting summary was adopted as final with no changes and is to be posted on website.

## UPDATES

### **Administrative (Admin) Work Group Update**

The Admin WG discussed the ACCG March general meeting agenda and 2020 topic/speaker list at its most recent meeting. The WG scheduled a working session for April 1 to review and advance the revised Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The working session has since been postponed because the group has a strong desire to meet in person to be effective and efficient, and believes it is worth the wait given the importance of the MOA. The group was invited to contact Regine if they are interested in joining the Admin WG's MOA discussion.

### **Planning Work Group Update**

The Planning WG ad hoc committee met on February 19 following the general meeting. Steve Wilensky drafted a statement of socioeconomic benefits which was then reviewed by the ad hoc committee. The committee is working to determine how detailed the socioeconomic factors should be given the ACCG's Policies and Principles Guide to Operations (approved by ACCG in 2010). Rich Farrington, who serves on the ad hoc, attended the Planning WG meeting and stated that he expects the group can reach consensus on several of the factors before getting into details about positions. The ad hoc will likely not meet anytime soon so the group may take longer to bring something to the full ACCG than originally expected.

One member suggested that the ad hoc utilize Skype or other video conferencing platforms as was the common practice when he first joined ACCG. Several members discussed using video conferencing, stating virtual calls can work for some but not all meetings and that there is a need to be flexible moving forward.

### **Monitoring Work Group Update**

The Monitoring WG is finalizing its spring symposium details. The symposium is set for June 10<sup>th</sup> from 8am to 5pm and will focus on the Power Fire area. The group is working to determine the speakers and stops, and plans to cover spotted owl, herbicide treatment and plantation treatment. Presenters include

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Helen Loffland (bees), Alissa Fogg (birds), and Zack Steel (bats) who will cover the variable density plots pre-treatment monitoring related to Power Fire decision.

### Roundtable

Regine Miller: CHIPS was officially awarded its Wildlife Conservation Board grant for the Upper Mokelumne Forest Restoration project with Amador Ranger District and Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority. CHIPS expects to get under contract in early April, begin field work in June or July 2020. CHIPS was awarded a CAL FIRE CCI Fire Prevention grant for the Arnold Avery Hazardous Fuels Reduction and Fuel Break Maintenance project, comprising over 900 acres of treatment in partnership with the Calaveras Ranger District. CHIPS expects to get under contract in later summer and begin planning work in fall 2020. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is conducting its due diligence on CHIPS' View 88 Fuels Reduction and Prescribed Fire Readiness project which includes 400 acres of prescribed fire preparation along Highway 88 corridor on the Amador Ranger District. CHIPS expects to get under contract late summer, and begin field work in 2021. CHIPS' West Point crew is continuing to work private contracts and BLM land this winter. CHIPS conducted a job fair in Woodfords and is increasing its staffing capacity in preparation for the 2020 field season.

John Heissenbuttel: The Amador Fire Safe Council (AFSC) was successful with its application to the CAL FIRE CCI Fire Prevention grant program for a little over \$1M. The project is located in Amador County and is the result of a collaborative effort between AFSC, CAL FIRE, Amador Office of Emergency Services, Amador Fire Protection District, Amador County Transportation Commission, and others. The project will identify the most important ingress and egress routes throughout County, outreach to communities to make sure AFSC and partners correctly identified the routes, and clear fuels from many of the routes.

Michael Pickard: The AFSC will also receive a \$1M from SNC in June 2020 for the Tiger Creek project. This is a stewardship grant which will allow for planning work on nine BLM parcels located in Amador County that will serve as anchor points for adjacent private lands. Michael added that while SNC rejected a grant application by the Calaveras County Resource Conservation District (CCRCDD) for a series of fuels breaks within the Highway 4 corridor, CAL FIRE has since awarded the proposal \$2.1M in funding through its CCI Fire Prevention Grant program.

Dawn Coultrap: The Stanislaus NF applied for and was awarded a \$1M SNC Forest Health grant for the Arnold Avery project. Dawn added that Rick Hopson planned to be on the call but the power is out in Pioneer and he is unable to phone in.

Joe Aragon: Advised the group to reach out to Forest Service staff as usual understanding it may take a while for them to respond. His cell phone is currently the best way to reach him.

Tim Tate: Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) conducted quite a bit of winter logging this winter up until last weekend's snow storm. Snow is expected to put work on pause for a month or so. Tim stated that the open winter helped SPI meet its facilities' log needs. SPI expects to resume operations without difficulty when woods dry out in early May. SPI has not started most of their spring tree planting; the current weather will push planting back a couple of weeks. The Calaveras Fire Safe Council was not successful in the recent CAL FIRE CCI grant cycle.

Greg Suba: The Lidar budget request to the State's Natural Resources Agency is still moving forward but the legislative session is on pause until April 13.

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Rich Farrington: Rich has been in contact with Paul Ullrich of UC Davis asking for him to present to the ACCG on climate change modelling and analysis of a mid-century repeat of the 2012 to 2016 drought and impacts to Sierra forests. Dr. Ullrich is tentatively scheduled for the April 15<sup>th</sup> general meeting but there is a question about the group meeting in person. Rich suggested ACCG reach out to Leroy Westerling, at UC Merced, at the urging of Paul Ullrich but does not know if Mr. Westerling would fit into the May 20<sup>th</sup> general meeting or not.

Thurman Roberts: CHIPS conducted a job fair for its Washoe crew; 16 people attended with CHIPS continuing the intake process to increase crew capacity for the upcoming field season.

Josh Sjostrom: Josh congratulated those who have been successful with their recent grants. He stated that with regard to coronavirus, all staff are available by phone and by email. BLM staff travel to meetings and field work is limited except for essential work (law enforcement or fire).

Katherine Evatt: Foothill Conservancy staff is working remotely; the best way to reach them is by email. Katherine shared about the Forest Service leadership team meeting with environmental groups on March 2. During the meeting, the Forest Service described its work with CAL FIRE and the timber industry to map out activities on Sierra forests that have occurred over the past five years or so. The ACCG SLAWG may want to look into this because some of the mapping the ACCG is wanting to do locally has already been done. The South Fork of the American River (SOFAR) red, green and yellow areas of agreement and the ACCG areas of agreement were discussed at the meeting, with the Deputy Regional Forester stating he is happy to receive this information.

Gwen Starrett: The Three Meadows Monitoring project specialist reports are finished, with the project now applying for permits with the Army Corps of Engineers and State Water Board. Gwen expects to complete the draft NEPA documents and hopes to begin field implementation this year which will include rock weirs, log ripples, and fencing of meadows under a contract with the Amador County Resource Conservation District.

Michelle Workman: She shared that the California Vegetation Treatment Plan (VTP) program is facing a CEQA challenge.

- Michael Pickard: He summarized that the VTP is a programmatic EIR (highest level of CEQA) for the entire State which CAL FIRE has worked on for a long time. The VTP is an attempt to avoid piece meal CEQA for thinning and fuels reduction work. Michael went on to state that CEQA exemptions are usually good for only 300 acres at a time and that the VTP programmatic EIR would be a new tool that could be used. Michael stated that he expects for the VTP to be available in the next year.
- Michelle stated that the California Chaparral Institute and Endangered Habitats League are the petitioners and may disagree with effects of analysis. Michelle stated she would send Regine the court filing for distribution to the group.
- Greg Suba stated that he has been following the VTP for over a decade and believes there are issues with underlying philosophy with how the State proposes to treat chaparral, conduct prescribe fire, and avoid type-conversion with particular regard to southern California. Greg went on that there are also concerns related to ensuring adequate public input during the process of developing and approving projects.

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Katherine Evatt: There was a decision to stop a conditions-based management project, the Prince of Wales project. Katherine offered to provide information if anyone is interested.

- There was discussion among members about the need to provide the Forest Service Region with ACCG focal areas. Katherine stated that the Admin WG discussed providing a letter to the Forest Service updating them on ACCG's progress to identify focal areas. The Admin WG decided not to move letter forward until the letter goes to the Planning WG for additional discussion.

Rick Hopson (update by email): Robin Wall is on a detail as a District Ranger on the Mark Twain NF, Poplar Bluff Ranger District until June 20, 2020. The Eldorado National Forest (including Amador Ranger District) is actively working to develop new business functions in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Offices will be closed to in-person visitors with visitor services provided remotely. Most employees will be in a telework status through April 3, 2020. Unless on leave, employees will be working and available via e-mail or cell phone. For business needs or questions reach out to Rick Hopson ([rick.hopson@usda.gov](mailto:rick.hopson@usda.gov)).

### Meeting Participants

Name	Affiliation	Time Committed to Meeting
John Heissenbuttel	Cal Am, Amador FSC	1
Katherine Evatt	Foothill Conservancy	1
Gwen Starrett	ACCG Member	1
Michael Pickard	Sierra Nevada Conservancy	1
Sue Holper	ACCG Member	1
Regine Miller	Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions	1
Rich Farrington	Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority	1
Josh Sjostrom	Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office	1
Greg Suba	Sierra Forest Legacy	1
Joe Aragon	USFS Stanislaus NF, Calaveras Ranger District	1
Jay Francis	Sierra Pacific Industries	1
Tim Tate	Sierra Pacific Industries	1
Dawn Coultrap	Calaveras Range District, Acting Ranger	1
Thurman Roberts	Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions, Hung A Lele Ti Washoe tribe, Sierra Nevada Alliance	1
John Buckley	Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center	1
Jill Micheau	ACCG administrator	1
Emily Graham	Mother Lode Job Training	1
Gerald Schwartz	East Bay Municipal Utility District	1
Michelle Workman	East Bay Municipal Utility District	1
Randy Hanvelt	Association of California Loggers	1