

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

*Planning Work Group Meeting Summary, August 26, 2020, On-line Meeting*

*Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute (CBI)*

## Meeting Brief

- The Planning Work Group (WG) debriefed the presentation by Dr. Scott Stephens as the speaker for the August ACCG general meeting and discussed ways that the ACCG could apply learnings. The WG also agreed that a prescribed fire panel at the November general meeting would dovetail nicely with recent presentations.
- The WG agreed to pilot “virtual” field trips this fall with a small group going into the field to photo and video document the sites and associated discussion and report back to the Planning WG. The first virtual field trip is slated for the Hemlock Project Area on the Calaveras Ranger District for late September.
- The Amador Ranger District (RD) and Calaveras RD gave project updates to the WG, noting that significant implementation work is occurring on the ground which may offer an opportunity for an implementation presentation to the full ACCG at a future meeting.
- The WG discussed comments received on the Project Submission Form, made some adjustments and suggested the initiation of the conflict resolution process, if parties are willing. The WG recommended that the Project Submission Form be adopted as a “working document, subject to change.”
- Megan Layhee, project consultant, gave an update on the ACCG’s draft Fuels Reduction Project Mapper and Prioritization Framework. Next steps in the process are to seek consensus in the SLAWG on the 5 broad HVRAs sub-HVRAs and relative importance scores, and then bring that to the Planning WG in September for feedback and to seek consensus.

## Action Items

Actions	Point Person(s)
Make correction to July meeting summary as discussed in meeting.	Tania Carlone
Plan for prescribed fire panel at the November general meeting with input from the Planning and Admin Work Groups.	Tania Carlone Regine Miller
Organize the Cabbage Patch (Hemlock Project Area) “virtual field trip” for late September.	Carinna Robertson Randy Hanvelt Tania Carlone
Follow up with District Rangers about making a presentation on project implementation efforts occurring on both Ranger Districts.	Chuck Loffland Carinna Robertson
Update Project Submission Form based on WG discussions and initiate communication to invite an issue resolution discussion among Shane Dante, Rich Farrington, Randy Hanvelt, and John Heissenbuttel to work through comments.	Tania Carlone

## Summary

### Agenda Review and May Meeting Summary Approval

The Planning Work Group (WG) met via Zoom video-conference. John Buckley suggested a revision to the July 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting summary to correct an unclear statement that referred to the

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

*Planning Work Group Meeting Summary, August 26, 2020, On-line Meeting*

total acreage of the Hemlock Project on the Calaveras Ranger District (RD)- 14,000 acres. The meeting summary will be corrected and posted to the website as final. There were no suggested modifications to the agenda.

## 2020 General Meeting Speaker Schedule

**Debrief Learnings from Dr. Scott Stephens' Presentation.** [Dr. Scott Stephens](#), UC Berkeley, presented at the ACCG General Meeting on August 19, 2020, "The Science Behind Forest Restoration." The WG debriefed the presentation drawing out takeaways and how they could apply to the work of the ACCG.

- **Prescribed Fire & Canopy Cover.** The WG discussed some "surprises" from the presentation. Specifically, how the mechanical treatments on the Blodgett Experimental Forest on the Eldorado National Forest (NF) appeared as effective as the combination of mechanical and prescribed fire, leading Dr. Stephens' to the conclusion that all of the treatments were effective. This suggests that there are more tools available to us. Some WG members expressed that applying prescribed fire provides ecological benefits and that many other studies have found that the combination of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments are more effective, noting that it's important to look at the body of literature not only one site-based study, such as with Stephens' work on the Blodgett. Another surprise was that 25-30% canopy cover may be more reflective of historical canopy cover. One WG member cited Dr. North's presentation to the ACCG, noting that his discussion about the "carrying capacity" of the forest implied reduced canopy cover as well. An overall message from the presentation is that there is a suite of treatments and being able to apply all the tools in the toolbox is important. The challenge for the ACCG is going to be to prioritize where and what tools to apply, which highlights the importance of the current Strategic Landscape Assessment Work Group (SLAWG) effort to develop the mapping and prioritization tools.
- **Canopy Cover & Vegetation Response.** The WG discussed that there is a relationship between canopy cover and vegetation response. When reducing canopy cover, that could worsen the vegetation response, allowing ceanothus, manzanita and other ground and ladder fuels to come in. Therefore, in the absence of maintenance to address the vegetation response, reduction of canopy cover could intensify fire.
- **Multiple Entries & Maintenance.** The WG found it interesting that Stephens' studies found that the first 2-3 entries needed to occur on shorter intervals and thereafter follow-on treatment entries (maintenance) could occur on longer intervals. This raised the concern and a conclusion that if treatments are conducted, there must be a commitment to ongoing maintenance. This was consistent with Dr. North's presentation that concluded that to create fire adaptive forests, it is important to create a re-entry program. The WG noted that fuel response in the understory is probably the most difficult issue to address.

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

*Planning Work Group Meeting Summary, August 26, 2020, On-line Meeting*

- **Getting to a Resilient Condition.** The WG discussed what percentage of the landscape needs to be treated to reduce density to get to a resilient condition. Some WG members underscored that the percentage of the landscape that can be accessed for treatment doesn't get close to what Stephens and North recommend to achieve a resilient condition.
- **Structural Heterogeneity.** WG members noted that Dr. Stephens discussed "if he had to do it again," he would have included more Individual trees, tree Clumps, and Open forest areas (ICO), clumps and gaps, for greater structural heterogeneity. Stephens' lessons learned also raised the need to apply science more quickly. There tends to be a lag period between when science comes out and when it is applied on the ground.
- **Letting our imaginations soar.** Dr. Stephens spoke to the importance of applying creative thought and solutions to forest management challenges. One WG member suggested that to increase pace and scale, there is a need to redefine conventional thinking that can overly constrain solutions, underscoring that we need to define what an ideal forest looks like and establish and maintain momentum, if we would like to have a diverse forest structure that leads to greater fire resiliency. Another WG member noted that the Forest Service has a lot of constraints imposed by a framework in forest plans. The next iteration of forest planning will provide an opportunity to apply science.
- **Preventing Stand-Replacing Fires.** The WG discussed how Dr. Stephens' presentation brought into focus that pre-historically, about 4 million acres burned each year in California, suggesting that it's not necessarily the number of acres burned but how it burns that is most important. All agreed that fire is burning outside the range of natural variability. The WG then discussed how to prevent stand-replacing fire, asking what can be done to avoid broad-scale high severity fire and how to accelerate treatments in places to stop this fire condition. The WG discussed SPLATS (Strategically Placed Area Treatments), noting that while this term isn't used much any longer, the science still supports SPLATS. If enough of those treatments are applied on the landscape, they can stop fire. However, the Forest Service never had the capacity to implement enough SPLATS. One WG member mentioned that the Forest Service may be taking SPLATS to the next level with PODs (Potential Operational Delineations). The WG talked about the problem of not having enough timber volume to pay for treatments. One WG member put a fine point on it concluding that, "We know what needs to be done, how we pay for it is the issue." The WG asked how we incentivize and pay for surface and ladder fuels, emphasizing that we need to create markets for those fuels and turn them into stimulus for communities, such as pellet production. Chuck Loffland offered that Panther and Scottiago are two Amador RD projects that are moving in the direction of connecting SPLATS, although not fast enough. Carinna Robertson agreed that the Calaveras RD is trying to move forward with SPLATS as well, but noted that they often get pushback when trying to employ all of the tools in the toolbox, particularly in owl Protected Activity Centers (PACs). She also mentioned while there is an issue of

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

*Planning Work Group Meeting Summary, August 26, 2020, On-line Meeting*

funding, the FS with partners is receiving a lot of funds through CALFIRE, NFWF, WCB and that they are working on biomass as well with their partner, UMRWA.

- **Fire at Lower Elevations.** The WG noted that much of the fires occur at lower elevations in oak woodlands, amid non-native annual grasses and up into the transition zone in the foothills. There is not a lot discussed about what are the most effective treatments in these landscapes. One WG member asked if we are capturing the hazard in the lower elevations in the mapping and prioritization tools.

**Speaker Schedule Update:** The WG reviewed the upcoming speaker schedule through the end of the year and confirmed that the prescribed fire panel would be a good fit to cap off the recent presentations on fire.

**Field Trips:** The WG identified possible field trip opportunities this fall to Cabbage Patch in the Hemlock Project Area on the Calaveras RD (first DxP unit) and the Power Fire area on the Amador RD, as well as a lower elevation example of lop and scatter treatments that CHIPS has done on BLM lands. The WG members also identified the Caples prescribed fire project area, Blodgett, as well as Foster Firs, Scottiago, and Panther, as possible future field trips.

As a result of Covid-19, the WG suggested piloting a “virtual field trip,” where a small group would go into the field, photo and video-document, and then report back to the Planning WG. Carinna Robertson offered that there may even be an opportunity to fly a drone over the Cabbage Patch project area. Planning WG members interested in participating in the field trip included: Carinna Robertson, Chuck Loffland, Kellin Brown, Greg Suba, Ben Solvesky, Rich Farrington, and Randy Hanvelt.

## Forest Service Updates

- **Amador Ranger District:** Chuck Loffland reported that the Cole Project will likely come to the Planning WG for more discussion later this winter. Surveys are being conducted this fall. Chuck noted that a lot of implementation work is occurring on the ground with partners and that it may be helpful to make a presentation on project implementation to the ACCG in the coming months.
- **Calaveras Ranger District:** Carinna Robertson reported that the Arnold Avery project is moving forward with PG&E and Sierra Nevada Conservancy funds. The Forest Service is working with their partner, the Mule Deer Foundation. CHIPS received a CCI grant and is working with private landowners on what will be a couple thousand acres of fuel breaks. Kellin Brown is currently working on the fire plan for the Moore-Belfour project. Planning WG members asked for more information about the treatments for the Arnold Avery project. Carinna explained that it is mostly a mastication and biomass fuel break project. Since there wasn't much timber volume, they will not be hauling saw logs from the site. The focus will be hazard tree removal on property lines, mastication, and biomass removal.

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

*Planning Work Group Meeting Summary, August 26, 2020, On-line Meeting*

## Project Development & Approval Process

- **Project Submission Form Revision:** The WG revisited the comments received on the project submission form. WG members discussed that they would be able to make some changes based on the comments but others associated with principles represent conflicts that may be more difficult to address. One WG member re-emphasized that the form is not intended as a project screen but rather that it is offered as guidance. WG members suggested adding the following language, “It is understood that not all projects will check all of the boxes in the checklist. Some projects will be strong in some areas and not in others.” Another WG member suggested that we are not going to change deeply held views, noting that the Planning WG has spent a tremendous amount of time on these discussions and has accepted the document as a working draft that is subject to change over time. Rich Farrington, Shane Dante, and Randy Hanvelt agreed to initiate the conflict resolution process to invite John Heissenbuttel to a discussion to work through his concerns. The WG also noted that it would be helpful to check-in with Steve Wilensky to get his input.

## Mapping Tool Development & Next Steps

- **Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP) Grant:** Megan Layhee, project consultant, gave an update on the progress developing ACCG’s draft [Fuels Reduction Project Mapper](#), the development of a prioritization tool, and next steps.

### Project Mapper

- Nothing new to report in terms of the development of the Draft Project Mapper, since the SLAWG and Planning WG gave the thumbs-up to the mapper in the last couple months.
- Developed and refined the automated workflows for updating the Mapper in ArcGIS ModelBuilder. As new project data becomes available from source agencies (like USFS FACTS database or Cal FIRE project databases), the Mapper will need to be updated periodically to reflect new project information.
- In the process of writing a supplemental handbook that provides a step-by-step instruction on how to maintain and update the mapper, and will also eventually have step-by-step instruction for maintaining and updating the prioritization tool. The draft handbook will be available to view at the time we hold our how-to e-workshops later this year.

### Prioritization Tool

- As a reminder, under that RFFCP grant that is funding this work, required to develop a landscape prioritization tool for the ACCG that will define and locate priority areas within the ACCG footprint that are in need of fuels reduction work in order to reduce the risk of future high-severity wildfires in those areas. This approach will require that we look at both the future risk of wildfire occurrence across the ACCG landscape coupled with identifying the location of important assets and resources.

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

*Planning Work Group Meeting Summary, August 26, 2020, On-line Meeting*

- Megan and other SLAWG members have had several calls and meetings in the last few months with folks from other agencies and collaboratives to gain a sense of the approach others are using to model wildfire risk and spatially represent assets and resources in need of protection.
- The SLAWG has decided that a multi-criterion decision framework, combining data on modeled wildfire risk and high-valued assets and resources, specifically the approach described in GTR-315, is the approach we should take for developing ACCG's landscape prioritization tool.
- The GTR-315 approach factors in the:
  - probability of any given flame length to occur within a given area,
  - the net impact (negative or positive) of any particular flame-length to a particular high-valued assets or resources
  - coupled with the relative importance of each high-valued asset or resource,
  - the relative extent of each asset
  - and finally the probability that any given location will burn in the future
- All of these factors are used to calculate the conditional and expected net value change of each pixel within the ACCG landscape for each high-valued assets and resources. These calculations will serve to identify those priority areas that are in need of fuels reduction work to occur on the ground.
- In the last few weeks, the SLAWG has come to consensus on what the overarching five high-value resources and assets, aka HVRAs, are, which include Communities, High-valued Infrastructure, Wildlife/Ecosystems, Economic Assets, and Watersheds, ensuring that:
  - The HVRA aligns with ACCG's triple-bottom line
  - The HVRA can be mapped
  - And that the HVRA is susceptible to future high-severity wildfire
- Each of these broad HVRAs will be assigned a relative importance score, which will serve to not only place all the HVRAs on a common scale, but will also be used to calculate the conditional Net Value Change (cNVC). only are further broken down into sub-HVRAs and each sub-HVRA will

## Next steps

- Reach consensus in the SLAWG on the 5 broad HVRAs sub-HVRAs and relative importance scores, and then bring that to the Planning WG in September for feedback and to seek consensus.
- The SLAWG will also be discussing and deciding whether the group needs to take some additional steps in the next month to reach a broader audience to gain additional feedback on the prioritization tool development approach.

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

*Planning Work Group Meeting Summary, August 26, 2020, On-line Meeting*

## Next Steps

- The next Planning Work Group meeting will be on Wednesday, September 23, 2020. The meeting will take place on-line via Zoom.

## Meeting Participants

Name	Affiliation	Miles (N/A-videoconference)	Hours
Tania Carlone (facilitator)	Consensus Building Institute (CBI)		3
Carinna Robertson	USFS- Calaveras		3
Kellin Brown	USFS- Calaveras		3
Shane Dante	Foothill Conservancy		3
Rich Farrington	UMRWA		3
Randy Hanvelt			3
Megan Layhee	GIS Consultant (RFFCP)		3
Robin Wall	USFS- Amador		3
Ben Solvesky	NRCS		3
Greg Suba	Sierra Forest Legacy		3
John Buckley	CSERC		3
Sara Husby	CSERC		3
Chuck Loffland	USFS- Amador		3