

# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

Planning Work Group Meeting Summary, 02/23/2022, Zoom Meeting, [megan.layhee1@gmail.com](mailto:megan.layhee1@gmail.com)

## Meeting Brief

- Presentation and discussion with UMRWA on their Forest Projects Plan, particularly Phase 1.

## Action Items

Actions	Point Person(s)
Post October meeting summary as final to the ACCG website.	Layhee
Send any feedback you have on UMRWA's Forest Projects Plan to the UMRWA team ( <a href="mailto:kareng@innercite.com">kareng@innercite.com</a> ).	All
Continue to take photo documentation in the field to validate LIDAR data.	Layhee (ongoing)
Continue to provide Planning WG with update on UMRWA's FPP Phase 1 and Phase 2 development.	UMRWA (ongoing)
Build relationship between ACCG and other collaboratives (e.g., SOFAR)	All (ongoing)

## Agenda Review and May Meeting Summary Approval

The Planning Work Group (WG) met via Zoom video-conference. The WG confirmed the agenda and October 2021 meeting summary without revision.

## UMRWA Forest Projects Plan

Richard Sykes, Karen Quidachay, Megan Layhee and others from the URMWA-Amador District FPP Phase 1 team gave a presentation and had a discussion with the Planning Work Group on the project.

Link to UMRWA's ppt slides: <https://acconsensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/03-Revised-UMRWA-FPP-ppt.pptx>

UMRWA's goal of presentation and discussion:

- Engage the ACCG, specifically the Planning Work Group, in UMRWA's Forest Projects Plan (FPP) Phase 1 with the ultimate goal of achieving consensus support.
- Solicit ACCG Planning Work Group input on the FPP Phase 1 as efficiently as possible, with particular emphasis on scope and scale.
- Determine method for gaining continued input from the Planning Work Group as Phase 1 develops.

UMRWA gave some background on the project, including Phase 1 actions to date and objectives. UMRWA then reviewed their forest-related work that they have done in the ACCG region.

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UMRWA then went on to review the goal statement, purpose and need, and project summary (i.e., proposed actions) under Phase 1.

## FPP Goal Statement

*“The goal of the Forest Projects Plan is to provide landscape level fire resilience and forest health to the National Forest lands located in the Mokelumne River watershed.”*

### **Two-phased:**

- Phase 1. “Mutually agreeable” ladder fuels treatments.  $\geq 10,000$  acres, ASAP.
- Phase 2. Landscape scale, thinning of trees  $>12$ ” dbh and other forest treatment activities requiring more time and resources to analyze and collaboratively plan.

### **Approach and Strategy**

- Clear the way for Phase 1 near-term implementation using treatments independent of commercial timber value.
- Simultaneously address Phase 2’s more complex but much-needed “revenue producing treatments.”

## FPP Purpose and Need

- Reduce and maintain lower ladder fuels to slow the spread and reduce the intensity of future wildfires.
- Reduce fuel loads within late seral/old forest ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems, and aspen stands. Preserve these habitats from loss due to large, high severity wildfire.
- Protect special-status species that rely on these habitats such as California spotted owl, northern goshawk, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog and Yosemite toad.
- To the extent possible, prepare the landscape for prescribed burning and improve the safety and efficacy of wildfire suppression efforts.
- Protect water quality, wildlife habitat and developed communities within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).
- Protect aspen stands from conifer encroachment.
- Work collaboratively with the ACCG to design effective, solutions-oriented treatment activities.
- Build relationships, rapport and set the foundation for Phase 2.

## FPP Phase 1 Project Summary

- Mechanical Fuels Reduction
- Hand Thinning Brush and Small Trees
- Pruning
- Prescribed Burning
- Hazard Tree Felling and Removal (for operational safety)
- Aspen Restoration

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Caitlyn Rich (CSERC) asked for UMRWA to clarify that Phase 1 within the aspen restoration areas commercial size timber would be removed, however the intent of Phase 1 is not to conduct treatments for commercial timber value.

- UMRWA will consider clarifying the goal statement to address what is being proposed in aspen stand restoration units under Phase 1, and the intent of commercial size timber, and that the goal statement should reflect that aspen restoration treatments are not focused on commercial thinning.

Rich Farrington (UMRWA Board) mentioned that he is concerned that FPP Phase 2 taking 2-3 to complete is concerning, and that Phase 2 should be completed in the timeframe as Phase 1. With the end goal of increasing pace and scale to save our forests. Asked if the goal of Phase 2 is to create a more resilient forest.

- UMRWA noted the comment. Richard added that using the phased approach, there would be plenty of coverage for fuels reduction work very soon, under Phase 1. Richard then added that yes, Phase 2 would utilize landscape analysis like SERAL to more strategically, and scientifically-based, create a more resilient forest.
- Regine Miller also added that when thinking about Phase 1 and Phase 2, the group should not only be thinking about the types of treatments, but also the scale of the different phases of the project.

Caitlyn Rich asked UMRWA to consider treating trees larger >10" dbh in Phase 1 to help stop high-severity wildfires and protect habitat. She understands the strategy, but thinks that it may be possible to proposed larger trees and still be mutually agreeable.

- Chuck added that larger trees will need more analysis and site specificity, which will occur in Phase 2.

Meredith Sierra (Foothill Conservancy) asks if UMRWA is considering FYLF protections (since it is being currently looked at for increase protection).

- Karen said that the project summary includes details on how this project would protect sensitive species.

Karen invited Jesse Plummer to speak to the goal of Phase 1 to reduce wildfire risk across the district. Jesse added that they already have a lot of treatments and NEPA decisions across the district. However, we need to be affecting more of the landscape as soon as possible. Hand treatments on the Caldor Fire allowed to take action quicker on the fire. Jesse wants to increase pace and scale of cheaper, mutually agreeable treatments (e.g., lop and scatter, pruning, chipping along roads, Rx burning) to fill in those areas that don't have NEPA coverage where we can reduce ladder fuels to minimize the threat of these areas becoming problematic areas

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during wildfire events. Jesse agrees that he would like to go over 12" dbh (but that is merchantable timbers) and keep on the table.

- Caitlyn added that if treatments are not removing the fuels from the treatment area, will the fire risk actually decrease? Jesse said yes, but that fuel rearrangement is a good first step and that he was impressed that certain treatments in plantations were able to do during the Caldor Fire. Jesse agrees that mechanical operations are more effective, but that it's fit under mutually agreeable treatment type, and added that Phase 2 can build on more intensive treatments in these same areas. Jesse also added that hand treatments allow us to go into sensitive areas and also, we are constricted on where we can go with mechanical fuels reduction due to costs, trying to do what we can without having to do years of Arch surveys.
- Rich asked Jesse if in those areas where you lop and scatter, can he follow up with prescribed burning. Jesse said yes, the two don't necessarily have to mix, but he needs to get done what he can with the tools available.

Caitlyn asked the feasibility of getting this work done at this scale, especially with the staff capacity due to other fires.

- Jesse said if that we don't plan for it, we can't get things done on the ground. Regine added that yes, there is a contractor capacity issue across the region. And Jesse added that a diversity of proposed treatments would help with the bottleneck. Richard added that UMRWA noted Caitlyn's comment and understand, but that UMRWA is aware that ACCG's bottom line is increasing capacity for local economies and contracts, so they are taking that into account. Chuck added that if we build it then they will come, if UMRW can show that the work is available then the industry will follow, and also what we are trying to do with the planning process is to blanket the landscape with NEPA coverage and that later we will prioritize the landscape and treatment the highest priority areas in the next 8-10 years.

George Dondero (CHIPS Board) mentioned that some past contracts that CHIPS has had included some constraints that made it difficult for contractors, and encouraged UMRWA to make that there is enough flexibility and that constraints are reasonable to that we can get good contractors.

Meredith Sierra (Foothill Conservancy) asked what is feasible to in terms of rater prescribed fire implementation.

Caitlyn suggested that it needs to be clear in the project summary that the FS would be the entity implementing prescribed burning. Caitlyn also asked how we identified the aspen stand restoration treatment areas. Chuck added that these are rough aspen stand delineations, that hopefully UMRWA will be awarded the WCB grant they applied and during implementation the

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aspen stand unit boundaries will be clearly defined and ground-truthing prior to awarding contracts. With scattered aspens that may not be a big part of this project.

Discussion on the need for UMRWA to add clarifying language in the project summary that prescribed burning is permitted in specific delineated areas, and also to delineate in future maps where and what pre-treatments are proposed in the prescribe burning areas.

Caitlyn expressed concerns that there was no mention of California spotted owl and goshawk surveys, which may pose a concern for some environmental groups. Pat and Chuck replied that under the SNFPA, surveys are required in areas of unknown occupancy where treatments might have effect on suitable habitat. UMRWA and the Forest Service view these treatments as not having effect on suitable habitat because we are only treating ladder fuels, therefore surveys are not required. Project will observe Limited Operating Periods. Richard will follow up with Caitlyn to determine which other environmental organizations need to be consulted on the owl/goshawk surveys.

Carinna brought up the feasibility of achieving the proposed prescribed burning acreages. Jesse said that he wants the analysis to include a large area so that the district can attempt to treat larger areas. Chuck added that the goal is to maintain fire as a possible tool so when the district does have the resources and the areas identified, they can burn them.

Caitlyn asked if there is an estimate of the range of unit sizes. Pat replied not at this point, but the bigger the better and that treatment units will be identified at the time of implementation. Chuck added that units will be delineated appropriate for the landscape, and based on priority needs, available funding, staffing and the industry's ability to meet those needs.

### **Next steps:**

- Planning Work Group meeting participants will send any additional feedback to UMRWA on the FPP Phase 1.
- Due to limited time during the meeting, the work group members should review the upcoming general meeting topics and Planning Work Group action items that were included in the meeting agenda, and to send any feedback to Megan.
- UMRWA will come back to the work group after hearing any additional feedback from the ACCG, and after refining the project based on initial feedback.

### **Updates/Next Steps**

- The next Planning Work Group meeting will be March 23<sup>rd</sup> via Zoom.

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## Meeting Participants

#	Name	Affiliation	Miles (N/A-online)	Hours
1	Megan Layhee	ACCG Administrator (facilitator)	--	2.5
2	Caitlyn Rich	CSERC	--	2.5
3	Terry Woodrow	CFSC, Alpine County BOS	--	2.5
4	Marie Davis		--	2.5
5	Andy Hespelt	USFS, Amador RD	--	2.5
6	Carinna Robertson	USFS, Calaveras RD	--	2.5
7	Megan Fiske	FC	--	2.5
8	Meredith Sierra	FC	--	2.5
9	Greg Suba	SFL	--	2.5
10	Chuck Loffland	USFS, Amador RD	--	2.5
11	George Dondero	CHIPS Board	--	2.5
12	Jesse Plummer	USFS, Amador RD	--	2.5
13	Rich Farrington	UMRWA Board	--	2.5
14	Richard Sykes	UMRWA	--	2.5
15	Karen Quidachay	UMRWA/Landmark Environmental	--	2.5
16	Regine Miller	UMRWA/Landmark Environmental	--	2.5
17	Rob Alcott	UMRWA	--	2.5
18	Pat Ferrell	UMRWA/Landmark Environmental	--	2.5
19	Matt Brown	USFS, ENF	--	2.5
20	James Thornock	USFS, Amador RD	--	2.5
21	Chuck Schwartz	EBMUD	--	2.5
22	Nancy Nordensten	USFS, ENF	--	2.5