

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

General Meeting Notes June 15th, 2022, meeting in-person at Calaveras RD Office and via Zoom

Meeting Brief

- Meeting facilitator: Megan Layhee
- Presentation and discussion on the YSS collaborative and the SERAL Project with Katie Wilkinson (STF, NEPA Coordinator), Patrick Koepele (Tuolumne River Trust, ED) and John Buckley (CSERC).
- Consensus item #1: ACCG reached consensus on supporting the McKays Strategic Fuelbreak Project on the Calaveras Ranger District, including submitting a LOS to the Forest Supervisor and to SNC for an implementation grant application.
- Consensus item #2: ACCG reached consensus on having Michael Pickard follow up with the Strategic Growth Council on possibly submitting a pre-application by end of July 2022 for ACCG Administration funding, through the council's Regional Climate Collaboratives Program FY 2021-2022 Funding Round.
- May SCALE meeting debrief by Rich Farrington and Meredith Sierra.
- Richard Sykes gave a brief update on Forest Projects Plan (FPP) Phase 1 & 2.
- Briefly went over ACCG Work Group updates. No roundtable updates.

Action Items

Actions	Responsible Parties
Send last month's meeting summary to the full list serv and ask for any suggested modification by the following Thursday, and then post final version with "DRAFT" watermark removed to the ACCG website.	Megan Layhee
Follow up on 2019 ENF LiDAR.	ENF
Sign and send ACCG LOSs for McKays Project to: (1) STF Forest Supervisor and (2) Cal Am Team for SNC funding.	Layhee
Follow up with CA Strategic Growth Council Regional Climate Collaboratives Program to see if ACCG is a good match. If so, submit pre-proposal by July 2022 deadline.	Pickard
Follow up with Patrick Koepele about getting a copy of the YSS funding spreadsheet that he presented on.	Layhee

Summary

Modification and/or approval of agenda and last month's meeting summary.

Megan Layhee reviewed the meeting agenda with participants. There were no suggested modifications to the agenda. Megan will send last month's meeting summary to the full list serv and ask for any suggested modification by the following Thursday, 6/23, and then post final version with "DRAFT" watermark removed to the ACCG website.

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

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Presentations & Discussions

YSS & SERAL Project: History, Overview, Lessons learned

Presenters: Katie Wilkinson (STF, NEPA Coordinator and SERAL ID Team Leader), Patrick Koepele (Tuolumne River Trust, ED and on YSS Leadership Team) and John Buckley (CSERC and on YSS Leadership Team).

Presentation materials: [slides](#), [YSS project status table](#)

YSS History: Patrick gave an overview of the YSS. YSS has logging, environmental, recreational, and governmental interests. The YSS landscape includes the portion of the STF within Tuolumne County and a portion of the STF in Mariposa County and a portion of Yosemite NP. YSS was formed around 2010 with an interest in finding solutions for the recognition of the threat of catastrophic wildfire to landscapes and finding common ground solutions that they could tackle. The Rim Fire (2013), which essentially re-galvanized the group. The fire caused the group to review what could be accomplished in the Rim Fire burned landscape, including non-controversial salvage and reforestation practices. The initial proposed amount of salvage for Rim Fire restoration efforts was very large and likely pose controversy within and outside of the YSS. So, the YSS came up with a solution for non-controversial amount of salvage to the YSS participants, and that what was adopted into the Rim Fire Salvage EIS. And similar story for reforestation. YSS recognized their ability to assist the FS with capacity-related issues by a number of things, including the formations of the Tuolumne County-STF Master Stewardship Agreement (since the YSS is not a legal entity), and what occurs in the MSA is supported by the YSS. YSS has also been integral in the SERAL Project.

Differences between ACCG and YSS: John gave an overview of what he sees as key differences between the two collaboratives-- ACCG is a pure collaborative process and an information sharing platform. YSS's focus is getting things done on the ground. YSS also has less meetings and also has a leadership team that makes decisions for the collaborative: less steps in the decision-making process.

SERAL Project Origins: John gave an overview of the steps that led to the SERAL project inception, see [slide 4](#) for details. In late 2019, the YSS Leadership Team, in response to Bernie Gyant's request to tell the FS what they want done instead of MOTORM2K, proposed the Bridge Project to the STF Forest Supervisor. YSS worked closely with STF staff to identify the details of the project, including priority areas and treatments. These discussions eventually led to the creation of the SERAL project.

SERAL Project Overview:

- 118,808-acre project within on both FS and non-FS lands in the Calaveras, Mi-Wok and Summit RDs, entirely within YSS footprint, and entirely within one of 10 priority landscapes identified as part of the National Wildfire Crisis Strategy, called the

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

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“Stanislaus Landscape” (250K acres), and SERAL contributed to this landscape being identified as priority.

- The SERAL project is designed to restore forest resiliency and susceptibility to natural distributes (e.g., insect, disease, drought, wildfire). Six mechanisms to restore landscape conditions under this project include, (1) increase forest heterogeneity; (2) reduce tree densities; (3) increase relative abundance of fire-tolerant and shade-tolerant trees; (4) reduce/maintain low levels of surface and ladder fuels; (5) using low severity, more regular interval fires; and (6) respond to natural disturbances that result in tree mortality higher than the natural range of variation.
- The key conservation objectives include retaining large, old and structurally diverse trees and snags – CSO habitats, and (2) reduce the spread of invasive non-native weeds.
- **The social needs include:** (1) provide economic opportunities for local communities (e.g. wood products) and (2) maintain safe access to public lands and reduce fire-related threats.
- **Proposed actions:** (1) forest thinning; (2) fuel reduction; (3) fuelbreak construction; (4) prescribed fire; (5) salvage of dead and dying trees; (6) hazard tree abatement; and (7) invasive weed control and eradication. See [slides](#) for more details.
- **How SERAL is similar to past projects** – the types of veg management actions. **How SERAL is different from past project** – scale, NRV-based restoration objectives, working collaboratively with the YSS, collaborating with professionals and scientists, ForSys, PODs, adopting/applying the 2019 CSO Conservation Strategy, use of Condition-Based Management (CBM) actions, and focused analysis (Chapter 3 in the EIS is specific to issues, not every resource – first forest to apply an FA to an EIS).
- **CSO-related issues:** 2019 CSO Conservation Strategy controversy and difficulty in interpretation of the strategy: logging within 300-acre PACs with no dbh limit or types of treatments -- so YSS agreed to only allow up to 20” dbh limit in PACs. YSS also set a limit for pines and Douglas firs to 24” dbh in CSO Territories. YSS also agreed to only allow up to 34” dbh for shade-tolerant white fir and incense cedar outside of CSO Territories. YSS also agreed to circular territories instead of territories drawn by best quality habitat. YSS also agreed to PAC retirement criteria development. Also, mechanical treatments were limited to no more than 100 acres of a given PAC.
- **Herbicide use:** SERAL project narrowed its herbicide use focus to only use for invasive, noxious weeds on a small number of acres in order to reduce potential controversy.
- **Project changes based on comments:** (1) herbicide use area refined; (2) salvage action areas, constraints and requirements; (3) retention of CWHR 5D/5M in CSO Territories via minimum canopy cover requirement; (4) CSO PAC and Territory desired condition assessment and individual PAC/Territory analysis added.
- **Record of Decisions (RODs):**
 1. **First SERAL ROD:** authorized fuel breaks (6K+ acres) that the FS staff judged to be most pivotal for projecting communities.

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

General Meeting Notes June 15th, 2022, meeting in-person at Calaveras RD Office and via Zoom

2. **Second SERAL ROD:** (1) 38K acres of forest thinning and mechanical fuels reduction treatments; (2) 231 acres of herbicide treatments of invasive weeds +
3. 54 acres where discovered; (3) 71K acres of prescribed burning; (4) road reconstruction and temp road construction; (5) Forest Plan Amendment for new policies for CA spotted owl.
 - **Objections filed for 2nd ROD:** (1) habitat quality reduction in CSO habitat; (2) circular CSO territory delineations, desired condition; (3) methodology used to assess restoration needs; (4) adoption of some aspects of the CSO Strategy (fear of that setting precedence for other forests and projects).
4. **Third SERAL ROD:** condition-based set of treatments.
 - **Objections filed for 3rd ROD:** (1) lack of specificity related to salvage actions and temp road construction needs; (2) use of condition-based management.

Funding: [see the table for detail on the YSS and SERAL funding streams](#). Patrick discussed the success of YSS getting funding and discussed some key funding-related take-aways. Main goal was to find funding to increase the limited capacity of the FS, so the focus initially for Rim Fire restoration work (and some other non-Rim Fire NEPA-ready projects) was on state funding, including the Wildlife Conservation Board, CAL FIRE, and Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Also, the fact that the YSS was working on the Rim Fire recovery, helped secure funding early on. Also noted that these projects included meadow habitat restoration, culvert replacement, aspen stand restoration, not just forest health/fuels reduction projects. Almost \$23 million was brought in from state funding and some foundations. Federal funding to the MSA totals over \$68 million, which includes the recent infrastructure bill funding of \$55 million, at least \$20 million for SERAL in 2023. One other funding source after the Rim fire was the Federal Housing & Urban Development provided funding to the county for Rim Fire recovery. But the take-away is that this funding already received is not enough – Patrick estimates that \$200 million worth of work to complete Rim Fire recovery and the SERAL project objectives.

- Rich Farrington asked for clarification on planning vs. implementation funding. Patrick noted that the table is for implementation, this is because the FS is heading the planning effort for both Rim Fire and SERAL, so outside funding was not needed to fund the planning effort.

Lessons learned/unforeseen challenges: (1) landscape level field surveys needing to be done prior to NEPA decision; (2) process to field validate land ownership boundaries (estimated to be \$3 million for SERAL); (3) translating landscape-scale proposed mechanical treatments to site-specific characteristics (e.g., steep slopes, road access); (4) unforeseen condition of existing roads to access treatment areas; (5) applying *new* modeling techniques (e.g., ForSys, PODs) in a large landscape planning effort requires more planning time and may create more controversy; (6) the issue between the Region developing the CSO strategy but no forest having amended their Forest Plans to revise any owl policies and to test the revisions; the (7) the amount of

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

General Meeting Notes June 15th, 2022, meeting in-person at Calaveras RD Office and via Zoom

funding required for large landscape planning and implementation is huge; and (8) presence of new fires (e.g., Caldor Fire) might delay ability to harvest green logs.

SERAL successes: (1) 100% consensus support on SERAL project from YSS; (2) taking incremental steps (e.g., building staff capacity at TRT and County, staff becoming well-experienced in contracts and project administration)

Discussion with ACCG participants:

Michael Pickard: asked what the ForSys scenario planning tool output is and what does it tell you.

- Katie responded that the R-version of the tool allowed staff to use a suite of input landscape metrics (e.g., size density classes, wildfire risk levels, NRV) to determine average values for each metric in individual LMUs (land management units) to inform what are the priority LMUs for a given treatment type. Tool was run for each individual treatment type to ID priority LMUs.
- Noted that the STF recent LiDAR fly-over data was used in the analysis. And noted that ground truthing (stand exams) of the LiDAR data has been shown to be highly accurate.

John H. asked about ROD 2 and the number of objections and asked who are the

- Katie listed the objectors -- John Muir Project, Center for Biological Diversity, SFL, AFRC, Society of American Forestry's. John B. added that the YSS and FS tried to minimize the SFL concerns over the owl strategy and the FS made adjustments to find common ground. Katie added that the FS has not fully resolved all of the objections and probably won't.
- John B. added that a lawsuit filed on thinning logging of small diameter trees in YNP (20" and smaller) by a group that filed objections against the SERAL to block bad forest management, where YSS sees it as essential forest management.

Richard Sykes asked (1) what specific proposed actions were not included in the final RODs, (2) is NRV a moving target if you consider climate change and did SERAL try to model with that assumption.

- Katie said that what was on the table early on that was removed was reforestation, but because there was limited staff and that the use of herbicides for this effort, meant it was essential to include in the final decision.
- John B. added that the addition of reforestation effort would have complicated the project and took away the focus on forest resiliency/wildfire threat minimization.
- Katie said that NRV alone is not a moving target, but FRV is a moving target, and that there is a lot of research suggesting that both NRV, but to do as much as they want to implement in a short amount of time, the focus is solely on NRV and not FRV.

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

General Meeting Notes June 15th, 2022, meeting in-person at Calaveras RD Office and via Zoom

Megan asked what is the plan for SERAL 2, how would the planning effort model be and

- Katie said that the idea would be that the FS Planning team will continue doing the planning work
- John mentioned that YSS is looking into doing additional planning efforts that is additive to what the STF ID team is doing. Suggested that the ACCG

Consensus item: Support of the McKays Strategic Fuelbreak Project

The group heard a brief overview of the project and reviewed project elements and map, all led by the meeting facilitator.

Carinna noted that a Good Neighbor Authority agreement was signed between STF and Calaveras County, which this project would fall under.

John B. asked Carinna to once again clarify “mechanical tree thinning of green trees” in the context of dead and dying tree treatments.

- Carinna added that there is a lot of removing dead and dying trees in the units, not a green tree timber removal.

There was a clarifying question by Michael Pickard about who owned the adjacent lands and why the project units developed the way they were.

- Carinna and Pat McGreevy addressed these questions: SPI owns the property in between the project and Arnold in the Love Creek drainage. The project boundary to the south is FS but has steep slopes down into the NF Stanislaus River canyon. Salvage logging in the SPI adjacent lands. Pat also mentioned the Smith Ranch and that the Cal Am team is working with Jason Smith to clean up that property, and then to the north of that is Calaveras BGSP. The project units, specifically 25 and 50 were divided by a road and would most likely have two contracts, and also the vegetation is different between the two units (e.g., pine-dominated, brush-dominated).

ACCG members came to consensus on supporting the McKays Strategic Fuelbreak Project on the Calaveras Ranger district and to (1) submit a letter of support (LOS) for the project to the STF Forest Supervisor and (2) submit a LOS to SNC for funding implementation of the project. Megan Layhee will sign and send the LOSs.

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

General Meeting Notes June 15th, 2022, meeting in-person at Calaveras RD Office and via Zoom

Consensus item: Inquire about and possibly submit pre-proposal for administrative funding through CA Strategic Growth Council Regional Climate Collaboratives Program

Group came to consensus to have Michael Pickard follow up with CA Strategic Growth Council Regional Climate Collaboratives Program to see if ACCG is a good match, and to understand what becoming a *Regional Climate Collaborative* means. If so, Michael will submit a pre-proposal on behalf of the ACCG by the July 2022 deadline.

There were concerns raised about whether the funding program objectives fit with the ACCG's triple-bottom line. This is why the collaborative decided to have Michael have a follow up call with the CA Strategic Growth Council to determine whether the ACCG is a good match for this program. Also, a question is whether the ACCG is too mature to be competitive for this funding program.

Bottom line is this could be an avenue for securing long-term funding for ACCG Administration. Michael volunteered to develop and submit the pre-proposal.

Marcie Powers of Calaveras Big Trees Association said that the Association would be one of the co-applicants.

May 2022 SCALE Meeting Debrief

Rich Farrington and Meredith gave a report out on the meeting. Rich volunteered to represent ACCG at the 2-day May SCALE meeting held by the Sierra Institute. Opening remarks were by Regional Forester Jennifer Aberlane and interested in presentation of Dept of Conservation and potential for multi-year block grants. Reason that ACCG was requested there was SCALE wanted an updated on ACCG and their projects. Here is what Rich presented on behalf of the ACCG:

ACCG is currently composed of 22 member organizations. We've been active for 13 years. Last September was the end of the fiscal year of our 10-year CFLR funding on the Eldorado and Stanislaus NFs, mostly in the Mokelumne River watershed that provides drinking water to over 1.4million customers. The focus has been on collaboration, restoring fire-adapted ecosystems, environmental improvements including four meadows and monitoring. We started the 10-year CFLR period with only members and no partners, last fiscal year member-partners provided 1.2 million for projects through matching and leveraged grant funds. For the 10 years of projects, the area treated was 48,766 acres, 47% funded by FS CFLR and 53% funded by partners and their grants. Accomplished all original targets to improve forest and meadow environments, timber sales stewardship, fuelbreak maintenance, and reducing fuels outside of WUIS. Missed a few targets in reforestation, improved fire passenger roads, aquatic organism passages, improved trails and improved rangeland.

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

General Meeting Notes June 15th, 2022, meeting in-person at Calaveras RD Office and via Zoom

Rich also presented on FPP Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects, including receiving \$500K from SCNC and \$5 million from CAL FIRE. Full implementation for Phase 1 (\$25K acres) was going to be around \$30 million and for Phase 2 (proposed as 200K acres hazardous fuels reduction and forest resilient projects) UMRWA plans to hire a consulting team to do the environmental work to increase capacity. Added that we waste a lot of time on grants that we are not successful at getting, which does not lead to increasing pace and scale. Rich also raised that if UMRWA was eligible for a GNA or if we could get a multi-year block grant, we could do a lot more.

Meredith added that there was a lot of discussion about multi-year block grants and how our collaboratives could utilize that. It sounded like the state would break up the state into large regions and that there would be a grant application for the entire region, instead of specific to a small-scale project. You instead would submit a project grant application to the region and they would include that in their larger region-scale grant application. Added that a blanket application for various projects for a whole region might be difficult.

Forest Projects Plan (FPP) Update

Presenter: Richard Sykes

Update highlights:

- 3 comments from Phase 1 scoping, been addressing
- Phase 1 team initiated Arch surveys, cost came a lot lower than expected, which will equate to more acreage than will be treated with mechanical vs hand thinning.
- Working on initiating Phase 2, including drafting RFP for project management and environmental planning services.

UPDATES

Administrative Work Group Update

Megan Layhee gave the Admin WG update. The Admin WG met virtually last Monday via Zoom. Approved June general meeting packet, discussed Administrator outreaching to ACCG members who have not participated in meetings in the last 6 months, discussed reviewing the ACCG C&E Plan a priority for next month's work group meeting agenda, also discussed moving forward with advertising the ACCG administrator position in the 2 counties.

Planning Work Group Update

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

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Megan Layhee gave the Planning WG update. The Planning WG met last on May 25th. Had presentation and discussion McKays Projects. Discussion with FPP Phase 1 team on the outcome of scoping comments and reviewed their draft issues analysis and had further discussion on hand thinning. The Phase 1 is moving in the right direction and that the team will have follow up . Based on conversations from the SCALE meeting and , there is a subset of PWG shared vision statement on how ACCG how better engage with tribal in the future – first iteration draft shared vision . Next week is the next

Monitoring Work Group Update

Chuck Loffland gave the Monitoring WG update. The work group met last on June 8th, with 6 participants including Gwen, and mainly discussed the Monitoring Symposium pulled together: July 14 (virtual day 1) and July 15 (field trip is day 2). Aspen symposium July 21-22 flyer will be sent to Administrator to send out to the group. Discussed summer monitoring plans – Three meadow project, WCB Aspen Assessment, A-A monitoring, VD planting, Caples monitoring, and Foster Meadow photo monitoring.

Funding Coordination Work Group Update

Michael Pickard gave the FCWG update. Met last Tuesday via Microsoft Teams with Rich, Terry and Michael. Reviewed SNC grant that is open now. Talked about draft guidelines for RFCCP – next round will be similar but more focused on regional planning (which we don't know what that the definition is yet).

Roundtable

Meeting ran low on time, so the facilitator asked if anyone had updates to provide:

Michael Pickard - SNC Forest Health Grant Program is open now. Concept proposal is due July 22. If you have a project contact Michael.

Rick Hopson – is back from a Regional Ecosystem Management Group detail. Happy to hear about the conversations today, noted that there are still questions, and that he was talking to the region about the ACCG and encouraged the ACCG to keep communicating about the need for block grants. Discussed about the development of the block grant agreements. It will be the last meeting for Rick, accepted a permanent position that he was detailed into starting July 18th.

Next meeting is July 20th 9-12 via Zoom and in person at Amador County Building in Jackson, 2nd floor Conference Room C.

Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

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Meeting Participants

Count	Name	Affiliation	Time Committed to Meeting
1	Megan Layhee	ACCG Administrator (co-Meeting Facilitator) in-person	3.0
2	Richard Sykes	UMRWA	3.0
3	Meredith Sierra	Foothill Conservancy	3.0
4	John Heissenbuttal	Heissenbuttel Natural Resource Consulting, Cal Am Team	3.0
5	Rich Farrington	UMRWA Board	3.0
6	Sue Holper	ACCG member	3.0
7	Marie Powers	Calaveras Big Trees Association	1.0
8	Regine Miller	UMRWA, Landmark Environmental	3.0
9	John Buckley	CSERC (in person)	3.0
10	Katie Ross-Smith	Cardno	3.0
11	Carinna Robertson	STF CRD (in person)	3.0
12	Michael Pickard	SNC (in person)	3.0
13	Chuck Loffland	ENF, Amador RD	3.0
14	Manny Eicholz	CSERC (in person)	3.0
15	Rick Hopson	ENF, Amador RD	3.0
16	Paul Prescott	Calaveras Big Trees Association	3.0
17	Kellin Brown	STF, Calaveras RD	2.0
18	Jan Bray	Cal Am Team	2.0
19	Pat McGreevy	Cal Am Team	2.0
20	George Dondenro	CHIPS	3.0
21	Colleen Shade	Cardno	3.0
22	Patrick Koepeler	TRT	1.5
23	Katie Wilkensen	STF, SERAL ID Team Lead	1.5