

Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Aspen Restoration Planning Project

June 20, 2023

**Presentation to the
ACCG General Meeting**

**Funding provided by Wildlife Conservation Board, Forest
Conservation Grant Program**



Project Team

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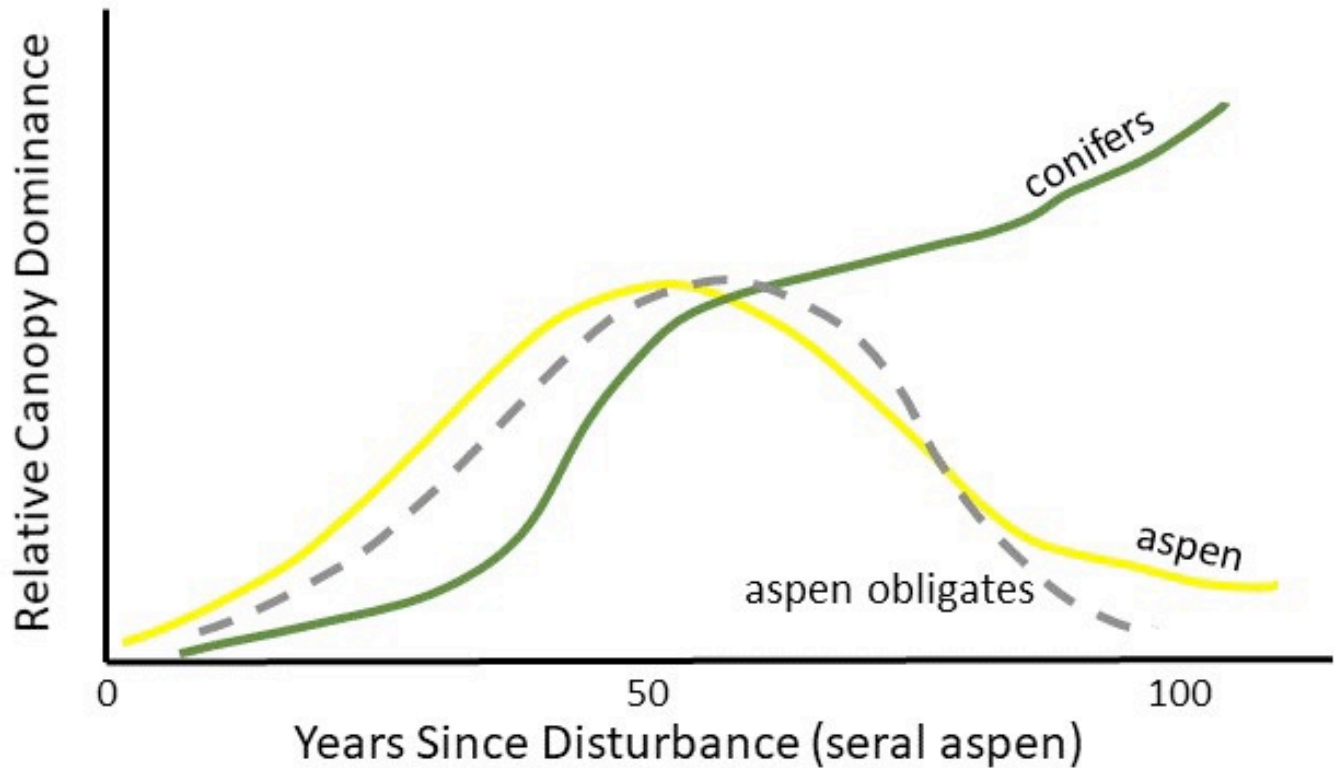


Aspen Ecology

- Aspen are second only to riparian forests in supporting the most biodiverse plant and animal assemblages.
- Species which are dependent on aspen will decline via loss of habitat if aspen forests diminish. In turn, obligate species will flourish in thriving aspen landscapes.
- Biodiversity is supported by dynamic, multi-aged, aspen mosaics at the landscape-scale. Such diverse, patchy, forest landscapes carry other benefits, such as fire resistance.



Threats to Aspen



Project Background & Need

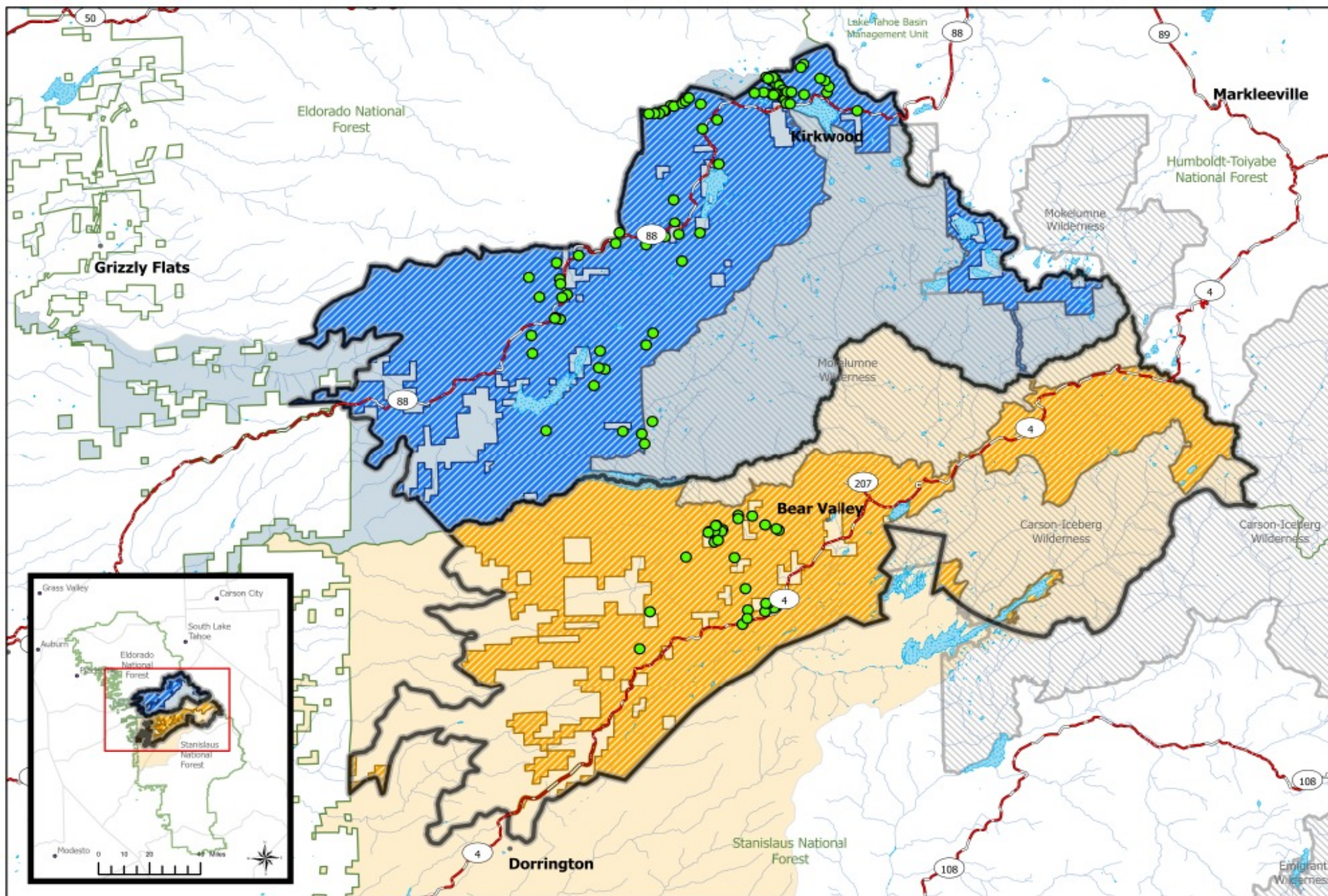
- Majority of stands within the upper watershed are unmapped, unassessed and threatened by conifer encroachment and wildfire risk.
- Only ~15 acres of aspen stands (of potentially 100s to 1,000s of acres needing restoration) in the project area are cleared through the NEPA/CEQA, restricting restoration.
- A comprehensive aspen restoration plan and NEPA/CEQA clearance are needed.
- Leverage info from the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL), 2001 Aspen Delineation Project protocol, and Western Aspen Alliance assessments.



Scope of Work

- Aspen Inventory, Mapping and Assessment.
 - Aspen inventory
 - Rapid assessment protocol
 - Monitoring protocol for aspen condition, deer use, birds and bumble bee to document pre-restoration abundance
 - Coordination with USFS and SYRCL
- Baseline Monitoring and Data Management.
 - Implement rapid assessment on all stands encountered.
 - Conduct monitoring on subset of stands.
- Restoration Design and Prioritization for 300 acres (minimum).
- Complete NEPA/CEQA for 300 acres (minimum).





Location Map: Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Aspen Restoration Project



Expected Outcomes

- Watershed-wide aspen delineation: GPS stand boundary mapping and condition assessments.
- NEPA/CEQA clearance on min. 300 acres.
- Pipeline of shovel-ready projects.
 - Enhance and potentially expand aspen habitat.
 - Protect a unique community of plant and animals.
 - Decrease aspen susceptibility to extirpation.
 - Lower wildfire risk throughout an important headwaters area.
- Baseline monitoring at a subset of stands identified as high priority for restoration.
- A framework for improving the remaining acreage, and for enhancing aspen stand health and sustainability across the watershed (possibly incorporate into FPP Phase 2).

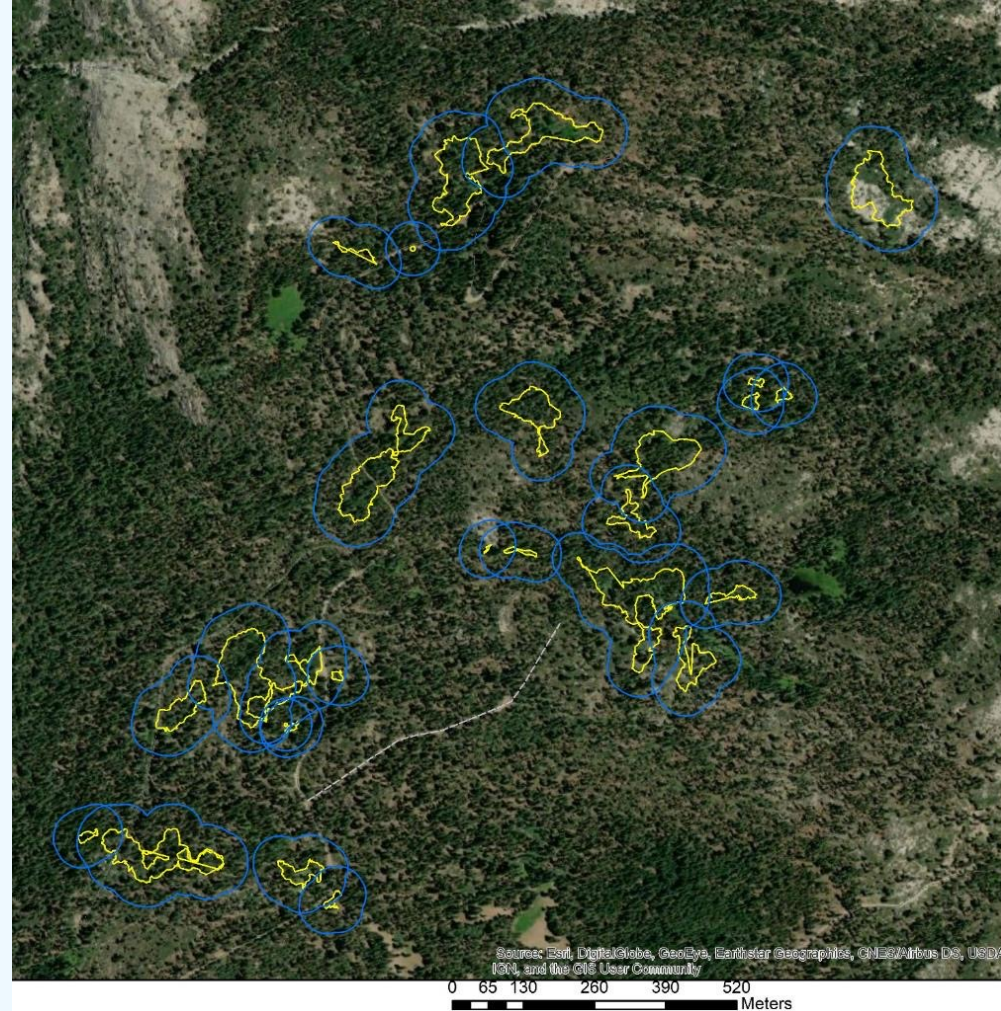
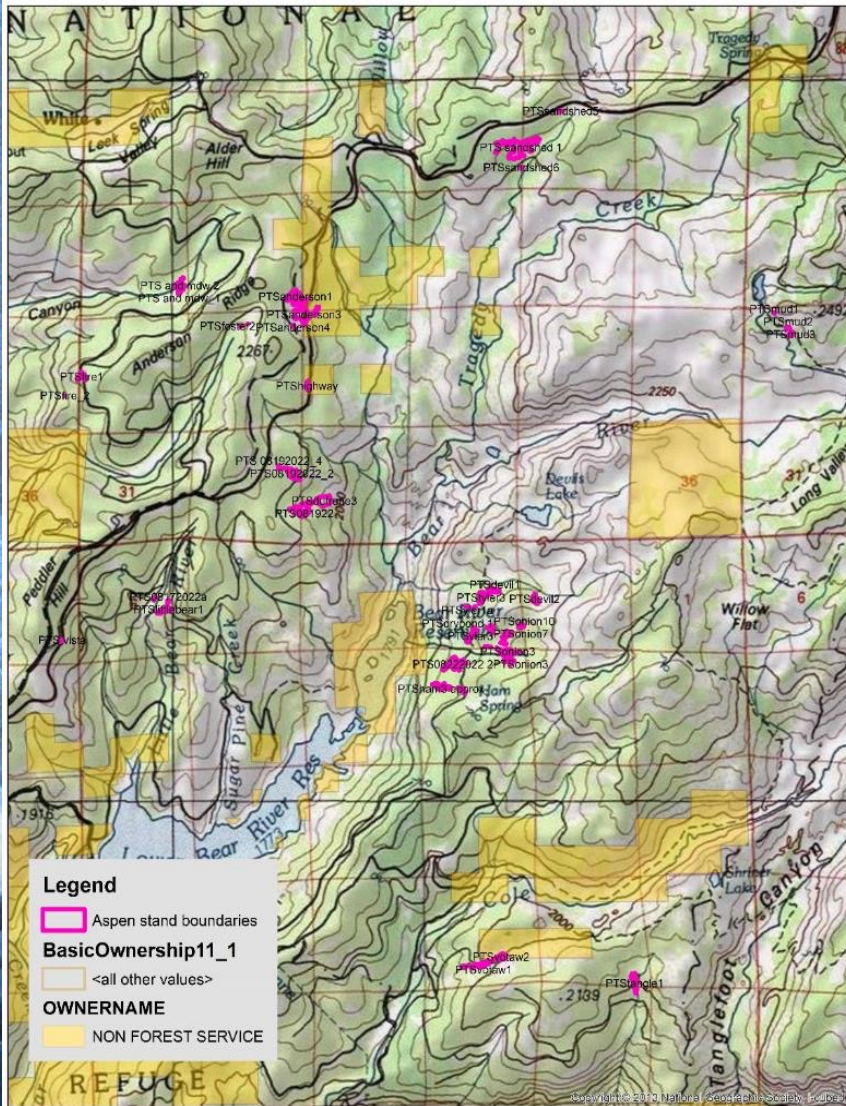


Aspen Inventory, Mapping and Assessment

- Desktop assessment of known and predicted stand locations.
 - Local knowledge
 - Available GIS data (LiDAR, WHR habitat typing, soils, NAIP imagery).
 - Expert verification.
- Ground truth and map stand boundaries.
- Complete rapid assessment.
- Incorporate results of assessment and mapping into ACCG SLAWG GIS mapping tool.



2022 Aspen Mapping



WCB Upper Mokelumne Aspen Project

Map: Aspen stand locations (confirmed, predicted)

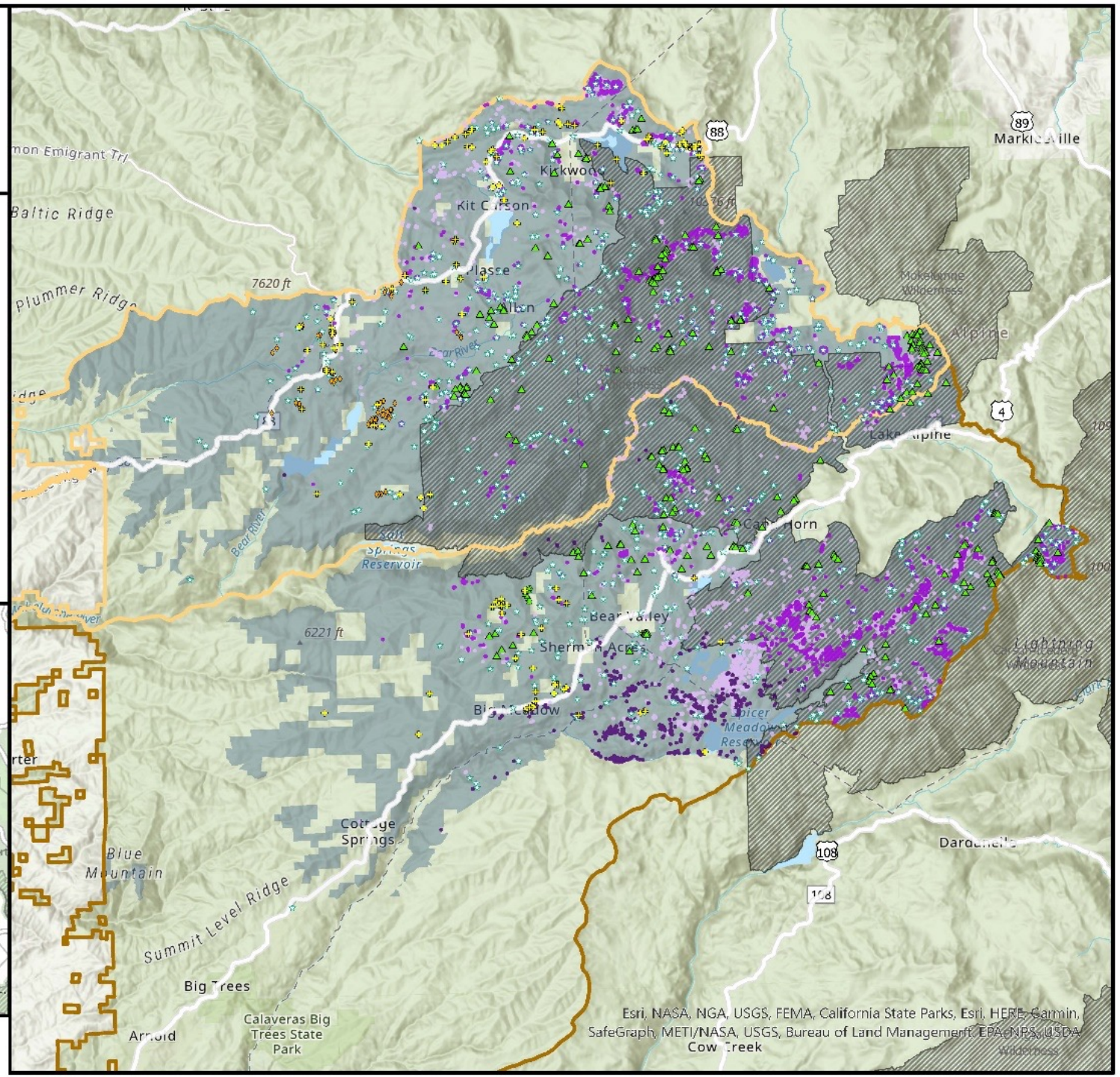
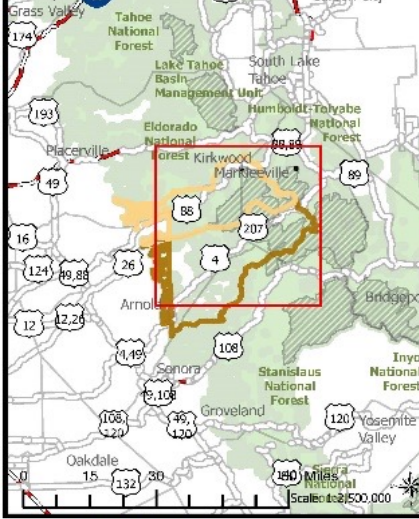
Eldorado National Forest, Amador Ranger District & Stanislaus National Forest, Calaveras Ranger District



- Legend**
- ◆ Field-mapped Aspen Stands
 - Known Aspen Locations
 - ▲ Predicted Aspen Locations
 - ☆ Meadows

- LEMMA**
- Aspen Basal Area (m2/ha)
- 44 - 265
 - 266 - 619
 - 620 - 3288

- Amador Ranger District
- Calaveras Ranger District
- Project Assessment Area
- National Designated Wilderness



Questions for ACCG

1. Are there any additional known aspen stand locations?
2. Are there any general locations you think are a good bet for predicted stands?
3. Is aspen restoration important enough to address in FPP Phase 2 (assuming sufficient time and funding)?

Provide your input in descriptive email, shapefile, screen capture of a hand drawn map.



Next Steps



- Continue rapid assessment and stand mapping.
- Monitor aspen condition, recruitment and conifer encroachment using transects.
- Document value of aspen community for at-risk bumble bees.
- Describe bird community and abundance relative to aspen stand size and level of current conifer encroachment.
- Monitor wildlife and livestock browse on aspen suckers
- Monitor timing and abundance of deer using pellet counts
- Develop prioritization tool.

Estimated Timeline

TASK DESCRIPTION	TARGET DATE
Monitoring Work Group	March 8, 2023
General Meeting	June 21, 2023
Stand assessment and baseline monitoring	June – Oct 2023, June – Oct 2024
Prioritize stands for restoration, and complete Restoration Plan.	Sept – Nov 2023
Develop Preliminary Proposed Action/Purpose and Need and scoping package based on Restoration Plan	Dec 2023 – March 2024
Planning Work Group (as-needed, estimate 3 presentations and monthly updates)	Jan - August 2024
Contract procurement for Wildlife Biologists, Botanists and Archaeologists to prepare the NEPA Project Record reports (concurrent with public scoping)	March – April 2024
Public Scoping (30 Days)/Issues Analysis	April 2024
ESA Compliance: USFWS Consultation (Biological Assessment/Letter of Concurrence)	May – Nov 2024
National Historic Preservation Act compliance/Section 106: Arch surveys	June – Aug 2024
Planning Work Group: Project Submission Form and request for letter of consensus support	August 2024
General Meeting: Request for letter of consensus support	October 2024
Final Decision Memo	November 2024
CEQA/NOE	January 2025
Grant Completion	March 2025



Thank you!



Photo credit to Gary L. Clark

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Upper Mokelumne River
Watershed Authority