



Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions Collaborative General Membership Meeting Summary May 15, 2020 Video Conference

FOLLOW-UP ITEMS:

1. Develop 18-19 YSS accomplishments document.
2. Mr. Connolly to write up press release with photos for NFF grant.
3. Invite media to visit some project sites for purpose of authoring article on SNC & WCB projects and visiting first MSA project.
4. Schedule a YSS field trip to see Cedar Ridge prior to beginning of implementation.
5. Organize a field trip to see the SNC and WCB projects and a field trip to revisit various planting method areas within the Rim.

MEETING GOALS:

- Share information about the Bridge Project and associated Spotted Owl Issues
- Receive update on effects on FS operations because of COVID-19

SUMMARY:

Meeting Opening, Welcome, Pledge and Introductions:

Chair Patrick Koepele opened the Zoom video meeting and asked for self-introductions.

Request by TUD to Join YSS:

YSS received an application for membership from Tuolumne Utility District (TUD). No objections were heard and TUD was welcomed as a new member.

YSS Supported Projects & Grant Updates:

Mr. Byron Kremple provided an overview and said most projects are under the Master Stewardship Agreement. He noted Ms. Carolyn Lott sent out a project spreadsheet with the newsletter at the beginning of May.

Granite Thin Phase 1 site work began last week. The consultant team is conducting stand evaluation and marking clumps and openings, and meadows.

Rim Fire Reforestation Phase 3 funding is being recommended by the Wildlife Conservation Board and will be finalized during the 5/20 board meeting. The grant is for \$4.7M.

The Mt. Lewis Plantation Thinning is being paid for with retained receipts and will thin 123 acres on Mt. Lewis. Biomass that is still alive will be saved. This is a crucial project for critical infrastructure purposes.

Pending is the Landscape Planning California Resilience Challenge grant for \$200,000.

The DFW Rim Fire Watershed Health Improvement Project includes thinning, prescribed fire, and reforestation in Jawbone Lava Flat.

The Remote Sensing Lab has the LIDAR data and has begun processing it. This information will include the percentage of canopy cover, tree heights, DEM. Data on basal area of biomass will be coming in the next few months. They will also conduct a building analysis to look at fuel loading near structures.

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Mr. Chris Trott asked why the county's application to Cal FIRE was not funded for the second year in a row. Mr. Krempf said he looked at who has been funded and it looks as if Cal FIRE was trying to fund as many entities as possible across the landscape. There is an opportunity to submit a new application in September. The LT needs to consider carefully before applying to determine if whether to include areas that are not Federal Responsibility Areas (FRA).

Update on HUD Project:

Ms. Maria Benech reported the FS planned to plant about 1,600 acres this year but this was cancelled in March because of COVID-19. They are looking at a fall planting. The FS decided not to bring in contract crews so they did not do noxious weeds treatment, but it will be done next year. They are moving forward with site prep spray next week, after the storms pass, in the 3N01 South area. The fuelbreak project will probably not start until Sept. 1.

Mr. Elliot Vander Kolk said SNC has a CA Conservation Corp crew starting next week. Last week they launched the biomass fund and had a webinar which is on the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) website.

<https://www.rcac.org/california/biomass-utilization-fund-has-17-million-to-finance-tuolumne-county-businesses/>

Mr. Stan Keasling from RCAC said, in addition to the Biomass Utilization Fund there are matching resources available through RCAC. The first round of applications is due June 12th. The timeframe for the loans coincides with the HUD grant which ends June 2022. Applicants need facilities operational and permanent employees hired by April 30, 2022. RCAC has assistance available for environmental studies. Mr. Keasling said RCAC also funds projects for thinning by capacity expansion through new equipment, but not for on-the-ground projects. Currently, they have interest from a company wanting to develop energy projects, one interested in producing small wood products, one focused on producing jet fuel, and one to produce biochar.

Presentation on Bridge Project & Associated Issues:

The Chair provided some history on the genesis of the Bridge Project. There was a MOTOR M2K Project and there were several concerns about the size and scope of that project. There was a meeting with Regional Deputy Forester Bernie Gyant and representatives from three different collaboratives. DF Gyant asked the collaboratives to tell the Region what their highest priority area of focus is. YSS ultimately selected an area in the western end of the Stanislaus Watershed and expanded the area upslope to the east. It is a 110,000-acre area. This area has not received much attention in recent years and there is concern of a wildfire impacting communities. The expansion includes more economic benefit from wood products. YSS submitted this priority to DF Gyant.

The Stanislaus National Forest (STF) has received attention from the Region and the Washington office because of the diversity of YSS and the amount of work beginning. The Washington Office directed \$2M to surveys in the project area. A portion is being put into the MSA to allow YSS, working with TC, to conduct surveys such as archeology, botanical, stand exams, and transportation and logging system analysis. The STF will also conduct bird surveys. Currently MSA paperwork is being completed. The hope is to get consultants on the ground this summer.

Ms. Kathryn Wilkinson, USFS, said the STF created a new planning team called the Social and Ecological Resiliency Across the Landscape (SERAL) Team. The footprint and scope have been refocused to the YSS Bridge Project area and working with YSS. The purpose is to

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increase landscape resiliency. This means a return to the Natural Range of Variation (NRV) which references the condition of the historic range of vegetation or seral condition. App. 40% of the landscape on the STF is out of NRV. Science supports returning the forest to NRV will improve resiliency. There are approximately 62,000 acres within the Bridge Project area that fit this description.

Future discussions will include details of treatment. The Chair asked the General Membership to authorize the LT to continue working with the SERAL Team. The FS expects the signed Record of Decision (ROD) in January 2022. The concept is, if this planning process is successful, other project NEPA's can be tiered off this effort but would still include all the public engagement requirements.

Ms. Wilkinson said the FS is using a system called Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) to help prioritize treatment area. 4SysX is a modeling process that allows for the evaluation of different scenarios. The modeling effort is largely being led by Mr. Peter Stine. The FS is using a broad group of people with different expertise. The 4SysX will be seamlessly integrated with PODS. Because of YSS, the STF was selected to test the 4SysX modeling process. Reportedly, YSS has the attention of the Washington Office. Success can be defined as successful collaboration, a ROD without litigation, movement toward resiliency, and economic benefits.

Chair Koepele said the LT has working goals – increasing pace and scale, improving resilience, testing new ideas, using prescribed fire, protecting communities, protecting water quality, improving wildlife habitat and meadows, benefiting scenic and recreational, and engaging with the community and beyond to build support for forest restoration.

To date, the LT has worked with the SERAL Team on language for science-based thinning, salvage logging, prescribed fire, reforestation of shade intolerant species, noxious weeds, and temporary roads for salvage efforts. The LT is now examining the priority locations for implementation. The LT agrees with utilizing prescribed fire across YSS landscape as it is a low controversy treatment. Control of noxious and invasive weeds are also treatments the LT supports across the YSS landscape. The other treatments are focused on land within the Bridge Project. The LT would like the membership to support continued LT work with the SERAL Team to further refine treatments and priority areas.

Mr. Krempf said Priority 1 is to treat near Me-Wuk Village and Cedar Ridge. This would include thinning, logging and biomass, and prescribed fire where these treatments are not possible. Priorities 2a and 2b are Long Barn and Cold Springs. Priorities 3a and 3b are Mt. Knights and Priority 4 is Strawberry. This is not an all-inclusive list, but a beginning. The priority areas are economically feasible, but also improve safety for species. They are ecologically and economically designed. Mr. John Amodio noted these recommendations are a culmination of a lot of lessons learned. He said looking at planning on 100,000 acres is an incredible accomplishment.

Mr. Michael Jow said within these priority areas, SERAL is working with YSS. The FS is trying to refine data on the landscape which will help inform treatments. 4SysX is a parallel effort of modeling desires. It might be an iterative process as the modeling may also refine the specific locations. The FS wants YSS to be open to looking at the landscape after modeling is complete.

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Money requires shared stewardship, so the FS is working with YSS and using 4SysX which is a decision-support system.

Mr. Krempf said the YSS project areas were defined by a relatively simple modeling process. The 4SysX is a much more refined process. The FS is using the YSS goals and considerations in the modeling process to help with what to focus on.

Mr. Kevin Rice thanked the LT for working so hard on this. He said there is a Sierra Club Motherlode meeting this weekend and he believes they will be much more comfortable with this effort.

Mr. Jeff Kerns asked for a copy of the Scope of Work. Chair Koepele said the scope should be developed over the next four weeks or so.

Mr. Walt Kruse complimented the process. He said the Audubon Society recognizes the need for treatments. A trigger for them is to be sure enough large trees are left so there is a mature forest. He likes the science behind this.

Presentation on YSS Spotted Owl Draft Strategy:

Mr. John Buckley said this is a critical issue to consider. He said he understands some have background on the Spotted Owl, but others do not. He noted there has been a lot of controversy over the Northern Spotted Owl and litigation occurred. In the Sierra, several entities worked with the FS to try to figure out how to avoid this controversy. A report identified clear cutting as leading to the reduced population size of the CA Spotted Owl. The FS responded with a California Spotted Owl (CASPO) Guidelines which basically eliminated clear cutting and logging of trees over 30" in diameter. There was continued controversy and the FS came out with the Conservation Framework Policy which, in many Sierra Nevada forests, place 20" dbh limits on logging and significantly reduced the amount of feasible logging in the Sierra Nevada Forests. This new policy eventually became the modified. There continues to be controversy and evolving science. Even among FS scientists, there are differing opinions. The STF would like to use the new California Spotted Owl (CSO) Conservation Strategy to guide work in the Bridge Project, but the LT thinks this will be controversial as there are some ambiguities in the way it can be interpreted and applied.

The LT is aware controversy has the potential to block what YSS wants to do in a demonstration project. The LT wants to minimize controversy within YSS and outside of YSS. These are the three areas where the LT is trying to provide clarity: The CSO Conservation Strategy allows thinning logging in PACS but some of the limits are ambiguous and/or highly controversial. The LT is recommending allowing treatment within up to 100 acres of a PAC with mechanical treatment and 20" dbh limit to demonstrate this is not being done for economic purposes, but protection. In the rest of the 1,000 acres of owl territory they are still discussing what can be logged at the upper limit still leaving drought-tolerant pines but removing shade tolerant species. Out in the general forest, the LT is looking at how to provide opportunities to be progressive about taking larger than 30" within shade tolerant species. Mr. Buckley said they are hoping today, the membership knows the LT is taking an approach with a very narrow focus that produces success and minimizes controversy.

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Mr. Rice said it is tough to start with the Spotted Owl. He requested clarification of what will happen in specific areas. He shared there is still some low trust of the FS by the Sierra Club.

Mr. Scott Gefland said he has been extremely impressed with the LT over his seven years in YSS and appreciates the balance of approaches. He appreciates inviting groups into conversation prior to developing a firm footprint. The Chair assured him the LT will do that.

Agreement: There was consensus to support the LT's to continue working with the SERAL Team on Bridge Project Area plans and the Spotted Owl recommendations.

USFS COVID-19 Update:

Supervisor Jason Kuiken said the procedures change daily. The FS is doing their best to stay on track, but there is uncertainty because of COVID-19. For recreation, there is a current order on closure that expires today. Many of recreational sites will continue to be closed. They are trying to open what they can. But the FS does not have enough PPE and actual supplies to open restrooms. They have a group working solely on the Pinecrest opening. It will not be the first to open. Cherry Lake may be open in the next few weeks.

They have had a pause for 8-9 weeks on prescribed fire because of COVID-19. That restriction has been lifted and burning has begun. No one nationally has done broadcast burns. This because it is unknown whether smoke aggravates COVID-19 conditions.

Supervisor Kuiken said there is a lot of discussion about how to respond to fire. He is on the national response team and the regional team. They are trying to keep firefighters at reduced risk.

Mr. Jow said COVID-19 did not affect much of their sales as over half of the volume is already awarded and others are ready to go. The Campy sale will probably advertise in June. The Granite Thin contract will be out soon. Black Springs, on Highway 4, will award in late Sept. to October. 2021 sales are on track for 40M board feet. Rock Creek East and West will be awarded. Prather-Medusa on Highway 4 will be awarded. In 2022, they will work on a Highway 4 shared stewardship program that involves SPI and connecting fuelbreaks. Projects that come out of the Bridge Project area are targeted to have the prework done so when the ROD is signed projects can start right away.

Other:

Mr. Chris Trott asked for a Looney status. Mr. Jow said they are planning on operating in that area this year. A substantial amount should be done this year. The Secretary of Agriculture issued a proclamation that since COVID-19 caused a drop in the wood market and lack of ability to process contracts, all contracts will be extended for two years if requested by contractors.

Mr. Jim Phelan provided an update on the Mule Deer Foundation Project. They are finishing the final 18 acres which will complete the Jawbone Thin project.

Mr. Buckley shared the court did not grant an injunction to stop work within the Rim Fire area up Highway 120 towards Evergreen Road. He said the project looks exceptionally good.

Mr. Gefland said the Berkeley camp burned down seven years ago during Rim Fire. Tonight, the mayor of Berkeley is doing a virtual groundbreaking for the rebuilding. He thanked TRT for their

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support in replanting. Ms. Benech said the FS is looking at planting in the fall. Mr. Seth Connolly said next week TRT will be talking about the NFF grant options. They would like to partner with the Friends of Berkeley Camp.

Ms. Lindsay Mattos said the RCD reviewed the recent Cal FIRE grant opportunity. Having CEQA requirements in place for each individual landowner was not practical. She and the state RCD association provided feedback to Cal FIRE on this.

Next YSS General Meeting:

The next regularly scheduled YSS General Membership meeting will be Friday, July 17th.

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Members

Name	Organization	Attendance
Jerry Jensen	American Forest Resource Council	Present
Jerry Fouts	American Motorcyclist Association, District 36	
Dave Pickett	AMA36/Alternate	
Jeff Redoutey	Blue Mountain Minerals	
Steve Brink	CA Forestry Association	Present
Walt Kruse	Central Sierra Audubon Society	Present
Linda Millspaugh	CSAS/Alternate	
John Buckley	Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center	Present
	CSERC/Alternate	
	Chicken Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians	
Chris Trott	CT Bioenergy Consulting	Present
Jody Trott	CTBC/Alternate	
Scott Gelfand	Friends of Berkeley Tuolumne Camp	Present
Phil Coffin	FBTC/Alternate	
Jim Dambacher	Dambacher Construction/Landowner	Present
Karl Dambacher	DC/Alternate	
Dwight Follien	Groveland Trail Heads	
Dusty Vaughn	GTH/Alternate	
Michael Damaso	Merced Dirt Riders/ Stanislaus Trail Bike Association/4x4 in Motion	
Dave Evans	Natural Resources Conservation Service	
Alisha Lomeli	Pacific Gas & Electric	
Rick Carter	Pacific Ultra Power Chinese Station	
Dennis Serpa	PUPCS/Alternate	
Stuart Crook	Permitee/Landowner	
Bob Brennan	PL/Alternate	
Ethan Billigmeier	San Francisco PUC-Hetch Hetchy	
Michael Esposito	PUC/HH Alternate	
Rees Warne	Sierra Outdoor School – Clovis Unified School District	
Brandy Lively	SOS – CUSD/Alternate	Present
Brian Wayland	Sierra Pacific Industries	Present
Jeb Brooks	SPI Alternate	

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Dore Bietz	Tuolumne Band Me-Wuk Tribal Council	
	TBM-WTC/Alternate	
Sherri Brennan	Tuolumne County	
John Gray	TC/Alternate	
Mike Albrecht	Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources & Environment	Present
Vicki Albrecht	TuCARE/Alternate	
Shaun Crook	Tuolumne County Farm Bureau	
Sasha Farkas	TCFB/Alternate	
Lindsay Mattos	Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District	Present
Jim Phelan	Tuolumne County Sportsmen	Present
Keith Martin	Sierra Club – Tuolumne Group	Present
Kevin Rice	SCTG/Alternate	Present
Patrick Koepele	Tuolumne River Trust	Present
John Amodio	TRT/Alternate	Present
Seth Connolly	TRT/Alternate	Present
Jeff Kerns	Tuolumne Utility District	Present
Ron Kopf	TUD/Alternate	
Jim Maddox	Yosemite Deer Herd Advisory Council	Present

LIASON MEMBERS

Bill Haigh	Bureau of Land Management	
	CA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife	
Joe Meyer	NPS, Yosemite National Park	
Rob Grasso	NPSYNP/Alternate	
Michael Pickard	Sierra Nevada Conservancy	Present
	SNC/Alternate	
Allen Johnson	South West Inter Face Team	Present
Jason Kuiken	USFS Stanislaus NF	Present
Beth Martinez	USFS/Alternate	
Michael Jow	USFS/Alternate	Present
Sarah LaPlante	USFS/Alternate	
Maria Benech	USFS/Alternate	Present

COLLABORATIVE STAFF

Carolyn Lott	Carlson Consulting	Present
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OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

Name	Organization
Katie Wilkinson	USFS
Byron Krempl	TRT
Randy Hanvelt	
Stan Keasling	Rural Community Assistance Corporation
Ed Pattison	TUD