

Forest First Workgroup

March 25, 2014

ATTENDEES:

Adam Lerner, NRCS
Bob Tincher, SBVMWD
Darrell Vance, USFS
Hugh Wood, SAWA
Lee Reeder, Self
Marty Dumpis, USFS
Mary Beth Najera, USFS

Megan Brousseau, IEWK
Mike Goulden, University of California Irvine
Robert Taylor, USFS
Robert Vasquez, RCFC&WCD
Ian Achimore, SAWPA
Mark Norton, SAWPA
Zyanya Blancas, SAWPA

Call to Order/Introductions

The Forest First Workgroup (Workgroup) meeting was called to order at 1:05 p.m. at the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority office located at 11615 Sterling Avenue, Riverside, California. Brief introductions were made.

Recap and Updates on the Forest First Workgroup

Ian Achimore will be the Forest First Workgroup's administrator. SAWPA, USDA, Forest Service San Bernardino National Forest, and Cleveland National Forest signed into a Memorandum of Understanding, which proposed to document and encourage further cooperation between the parties to proactively improve the health and the resilience of the watershed in the Santa Ana River Watershed that are critical for delivering quality water supplies. Forest First is envisioned as a collaborative venture between the U.S. Forest Service and downstream stakeholders that focuses on developing methods to ensure that the national forests within the Santa Ana River Watershed are kept as healthy as possible and continue to provide high quality water to the valleys below. The collaborative efforts in the Forest First include four main watershed restoration strategies that would provide significant benefits downstream:

1. Forest fuels management: focuses on reducing understory growth that can contribute to the intensity of fires, making them more devastating and difficult to fight
2. Restoration of chaparral plant: areas that have not recovered due to repeated fires, and where native vegetation has been replaced by grasses that increase runoff, instead of the chaparral benefit of capturing and dispersing rainfall, and allowing moisture to percolate and recharge groundwater basins
3. Meadow restoration: return water that had been converted to conveyance back to a meadow sheet flow so that the meadow can function in a natural groundwater recharge capacity
4. Retrofitting roads: reduce water conveyance, reduce fire risk, and increase the number of fire breaks

The workgroup was asked to share their knowledge of conferences that focus on the integration of forest and land management.

Marty Dumpis briefly discussed the purpose of the Chaparral Restoration workshop that took place June 17-18, 2013 at the Angeles National Forest Training Center. They had guest speaker Ramón Vallejo from Spain, who provided a perspective on how they were dealing with chaparral restoration.

At the conference, discussion ensued on the topics of what we don't know, what we do know, and what kind of monitoring are we doing for the restoration of chaparral. There are talks of a follow up workshop that might take place next winter. The region's priority as of now is to address the Rim fire, the American fire, and Aspen fires. Mr. Dumpis said that fire settlement money has given the Forest Service an opportunity to create a project to restore areas like the Sayre fires near Topanga.

Mr. Achimore reported on the Urban Water Institute Spring Conference on February 19-21, 2014 in Palm Springs. Dr. Roger C. Bales and Dr. Martha Conklin gave a presentation on the Southern Sierra Critical Zone Observatory. This topic will be discussed further in the minutes.

Robert Taylor announced the Fire Ecosystem Forest Management and Water Yield Symposium is scheduled for May 2, 2014 at 9:00 A.M. at the USFS Wildland Fire Training Center. Mr. Taylor referenced an article from The Modesto Bee called "Overgrown Sierra Forests Gulping Water that Could Flow to Valley."

Mary Beth Najera described the process of prescribed fires and indicated that windows of opportunities to perform prescribed fires take place every five years. When native species are introduced to an area the Forest Service will wait at least ten years before they execute a prescribed fire. Thinning the forest to the proper component and road retrofitting are also beneficial; it reduces sediment by reducing fires and prevents fires from expanding.

Recap and Updates on Proposition 84 Round 2: Forest First Project

Through the Proposition 84 Round 2 funds, US Forest Service was awarded funds to move forward on their increase in water quality by reducing sediment due to wildfires and increasing water quantity. Mr. Taylor provided a brief update on the pilot project.

Ms. Najera reported that fire breaks are being strategically put to in the forest to aid fire fighters in case of fires. She also reports that genetically engineered tree plantations, were planted in the 1960s as a drought tolerant pine tree, are now fire hazardous due to lack of maintenance. Many of them are dying because of root rot. It is not known whether the root rot is derived from the genetic engineering or old age.

Mr. Taylor claims that it is difficult to prove the improvement of water quantity. There is a level of forest management that needs to be establish as to not disturb any endangered forest species. The area is not an experimental area where they could obtain measurements beforehand.

Bob Tincher asked if there was a way to correlate past stream data to a pre-set gauge to get a tight correlation. Based on the stream flow data, he suggested we could prove a change in water quantity.

Monitoring Forest First: How Do We Analyze the Benefits of a Forest First Approach?

Dr. Michael L. Goulden, Professor at the University of California Irvine, spoke about two on-going projects:

1. Southern Sierra Critical Zone Observatory (Sierra CZO) is a program that investigates how the water cycle drives Critical Zone processes, focusing on water balance, nutrient cycling, and weathering across the rain-snow transition.
2. The Kings River Experimental Watersheds (KREW) is a watershed-level, integrated ecosystem project for headwater streams in the Sierra Nevada. Seven watersheds have been chosen and fully instrumented to monitor ecosystem changes. Each watershed will receive one of three

management treatments, or serve as a control. The three treatments will be uneven-aged group selection thinning, prescribed fire, and a thinning with burn combination.

For more information Dr. Goulden could be reached at mgoulden@uci.edu.

Recap and Discuss the California Department of Water Resource's Proposition 84 Integrated Regional Water Management

Department of Water Resources, DWR, staff indicated that since the passage of SB 103 and 104 Drought Relief bills, on March 1, 2014, significant changes are now planned to the next funding solicitations under the Proposition 84 Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Program, Chapter 2.

Under SB 103 and 104 Drought Relief bills, \$200 million was allocated statewide for an expedited drought relief coming from Proposition 84 IRWM, Chapter 2 grant program. DWR, in response, has decided to break up Round 3 into two separate grant solicitations under the Proposition 84 IRWM grant program, one in 2014 and one in 2015, and will be dropping the reference to Rounds. The 2014 Expedited Drought Relief grant program is expected to have new Draft Guidelines and a Proposal Solicitation Package (PSP) issued by DWR by April 1, 2014 with a 35-day public review period with public workshops in May 2014. Thereafter, final Guidelines and PSP are expected by June 1, 2014 with actual grant applications being due from IRWM regions to DWR by August 2014.

The types of projects that DWR will be seeking to fund under the 2014 grant solicitation are based on the SB 104 language on drought relief and will be further defined in the new guidelines that are being prepared by DWR. They are generally described as follows:

- Immediate regional drought preparedness
- Increase local water supply reliability and the delivery of safe drinking water
- Assist water suppliers and regions to implement conservation programs and measures that are not locally cost-effective
- Reduce water quality conflicts or ecosystem conflicts created by the drought

Mr. Norton advised the workgroup to incorporate drought relief into their projects. SAWPA is in the process of scheduling an Integrated Workshop to get further input from potential proponents.

Schedule Future Meeting

A future meeting will be scheduled at a later time.

Adjournment

The Forest First Workgroup meeting adjourned at 3:13 p.m.

Handouts/Presentations (available at www.sawpa.org)

1. Sierra Nevada Critical Zone Observatory and Kings River Experimental Watershed Presentations – Mike Goulden, UCI
2. Forest First Workgroup – Ian Achimore, SAWPA