



Collaborative Group - Meeting Summary

Meeting held September 13, 2017

Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute

Meeting in Brief

At the September SOFAR Collaborative meeting, Dave Johnston and Candace Thomas from the El Dorado County Air Quality Management District presented on the District's permitting practices. The District discussed the value of prescribed fire and willingness to work with the Collaborative to advance initiatives on the SOFAR landscape. Chris Dallas, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, shared an overview of the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative, Kathy Smith presented on stewardship agreements as a potential approach to funding fuel load reduction across the SOFAR landscape, and Collaborative participants shared committee updates. An all-day Cohesive Strategy field trip will take place on October 11 in lieu of the October Collaborative meeting.

Action Items

Who	What
Steering Committee/ENF	Develop materials for October field trip
Norma	Reschedule Patrick Wright presentation for Nov. 12
	Schedule Craig Thomas for Collaborative presentation on the 12 hindrances to utilizing burn days
CBI/ENF	Available to help organizations decide whether to sign SOFAR charter
Supervisor Veerkamp	Work with Air Resources Board on increasing range and opportunity for burn-day exemptions
Steering Committee	Look at Collaborative's strategy and 2018 trajectory; ID experts and range of tools
Funding and Finance Committee	Seeking additional participation/support, including from CalFire + USFS

MEETING SUMMARY

Introduction

The SOFAR Cohesive Strategy Collaborative **Charter** outlines the protocols, working agreements, and intent of the Collaborative while publicly demonstrating the Collaborative's diverse membership and its members' commitment to working together. The Steering Committee and the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) are available to help organizations decide whether to sign the Charter ([view Charter](#)).

Facilitator Gina Bartlett reviewed the following **working agreements** for the meeting. The working agreements are intended to support a productive dialogue and advance the Collaborative's goals.

- All ideas have value
- Respect
- Listen to understand and create a problem-solving environment
- Be comfortable
- Avoid editorials
- Humor welcome

Air Quality and Fire

Dave Johnston and Candace Thomas from the El Dorado County Air Quality Management District (AQMD) presented on the AQMD's permitting practices. The District discussed the value of prescribed fire and willingness to work with the Collaborative to advance initiatives on the SOFAR landscape. . Recognizing that there is net-positive benefit to prescribed fire, the AQMD aims to actively support prescribed burning. The El Dorado AQMD approves nearly 100% of applications for prescribed burn permits and is one of only two air quality districts in California that does not charge a fee for prescribed burn permits.

The AQMD is governed by a five-member board of directors who also compose the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. Its goal is to work with residents and business districts to steadily improve air quality and protect public health while avoiding negative impacts to economic growth. The AQMD oversees prescribed burning, residential burning, woodstove and lawnmower replacement, and other initiatives and has authority to issue citations for violation of air district rules. While the AQMD makes available a range of grant opportunities, current funding streams are largely tied to motor vehicles and woodstoves.

At the request of Collaborative participants, Johnston and Thomas clarified **burn windows**. Meteorologists at the California Air Resources Board determine burn and no-burn days. The AQMD approves acres for burning on a day-by-day basis, based on a three-day or greater meteorological forecast. While approval lasts for only a single day at a time, the AQMD is willing to work with foresters to support longer-term burn projects. Some participants noted that it would be helpful to receive advanced burn approval.

In looking at data related to prescribed fire permitting, Collaborative members noted that far more acres are approved annually for prescribed burning than are actually burned. Craig Thomas recently presented in another forum on eleven reasons why approved acres are not ultimately burned. Collaborative participants requested that Thomas present on this topic at an upcoming Collaborative meeting, with the intention of identifying and addressing the factors that have the greatest impact and/or are easiest to address (i.e. the low hanging fruit). Collaborative members mentioned a few factors that account for the discrepancy between acres approved and acres burned. In 2017, weather conditions were often too wet to successfully burn; additionally, agencies often apply for multiple sites and, once approved, select one site to burn.

Discussion

Under the existing process, agencies develop and implement multi-year burn plans that utilize daily permits. AQMD staff work hard to be nimble and actively support these efforts. Given the right circumstances, the AQMD can approve prescribed fire on a no-burn day. The AQMD does not provide an opinion on *where* burning should occur, as agencies work at the whole-landscape level.

If the California tree mortality crisis continues to worsen, state laws may change to further support prescribed fire. Additionally, the County and AQMD prioritize life-safety and may establish a designated burn window in May or October exclusively for life-safety projects in WUI communities. A participant raised the possibility of working with the state to expeditiously burn in areas where there is high risk of wildfire. The Highway 50 corridor is one example of an area that is at high risk of wildfire and thus would yield substantial benefits from prescribed burning. The Mountain Counties Association worked with the state to support permitting on marginal burn days for areas outside of residential zones. Marginal burn days (on the cusp of 500 millibars of atmospheric pressure) cause less smoke dispersal.

Planning a prescribed burn involves numerous logistical challenges. Most private and state agency burns are conducted in and around communities, on smaller acreage with tight parameters for burn/no-burn; these burns require constant staffing.

Many participants agree that existing burn days are underutilized and that substantial acreage would benefit from prescribed fire. USFS conducts wildfire suppression training during optimal burn windows. The Collaborative recommends discussing how to restructure suppression training such that USFS staff are available for prescribed burn days.

Several participants observed the importance of publicly emphasizing the benefits of prescribed fire (in contrast to catastrophic wildfire). Education and messaging about prescribed burning and the associated smoke will help the public better understand fire in the California ecosystem from a social and ecological perspective.

The AQMD plans to look at the Caples restoration area in the near future, in an effort to understand the project as a whole and to identify sensitive receptors (such as towns or ski resorts) that might be impacted and how best to reduce the impact.

Next Steps: At an upcoming Collaborative meeting, Craig Thomas will present on the twelve hindrances to prescribed fire, and a focus on how to address. Additionally, Collaborative members and the USFS will examine how to strategically ensure that personnel are available for both prescribed burning and fire suppression. El Dorado County Supervisor Brian Veerkamp will work with the Air Resources Board on increasing range and opportunity for burn-day exemptions.

Overview of Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative

Chris Dallas, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, shared an overview of the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative, which is a partnership between the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and the California Tahoe Conservancy.

Dallas shared the following key points:

- The initiative draws funding and helps move projects forward by weaving the work of different collaborative groups into a broad, landscape-level plan.
- The initiative encompasses most of Tahoe National Forest and a large portion of the Eldorado National Forest and the Tahoe Basin.
- A number of existing collaborative projects feed this initiative: SOFAR Cohesive Strategy, Fire Adapted 50, Western Nevada County Defensible Space (a collaborative of Fire Safe Councils and USFS).
- The Initiative was recently awarded \$5 million from greenhouse gas reduction funds for seven projects.
- Some projects are already underway as part of the initiative – including Caples - while other projects are planned for the future.
- The Initiative recently awarded mastication work for the Tobacco Gulch project, which will begin this fall.

Next Steps: At the November Collaborative meeting, Tahoe Conservancy Executive Director Patrick Wright, if available, will provide greater detail about the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative.

Stewardship Contract/Agreements

Kathy Smith presented about the impact of fire on her property and potential approaches to funding fuel load reduction across the SOFAR landscape. Smith noted that, given the urgency of the issue, the annual acreage that undergoes treatment needs to substantially increase from 2,000 acres per year. She worries that other residents risk losing their places to catastrophic wildfire. Smith shared the following ideas how to generate funds to support an increased pace of forest treatments:

Smith identified constraints on the number of acres treated annually:

- Reliance on federal funding
- Cutting restrictions and limitations (such as on owl PACS, steep terrain and designated wilderness area)
- 2004 Sierra Nevada Framework includes an agreement not to cut any trees larger than 30" diameter at breast height (dbh). Forest inventory analysis shows that there are 20 million board feet per acre, 54% of which are trees larger than 30" dbh.
- When timber revenues exceed service costs, revenue is retained at the local level and can be invested back into the forest.

Smith proposed the following to advance SOFAR goals:

- Explore the possibility of cutting larger diameter trees on the SOFAR acreage, while including limitations.
- Identify outside experts to help generate ideas and support Collaborative efforts (scientists, fire experts, and other experts).

- Explore stewardship contract/agreement possibilities: USFS staff could talk to Collaborative about stewardship contracts/agreements.

Discussion

Stewardship agreements are a powerful tool that enables USFS to enter into partnerships with organizations such as the National Wild Turkey Federation. The Eldorado National Forest relies heavily on stewardship contracts.

A significant amount of federal funding currently goes to fire suppression, which presents an opportunity to redirect some of those funds toward landscape scale fire prevention. Some participants agreed that relying on federally appropriated funding and other public funds is unwise, and leveraging private funds is essential. A participant posited that a reliable supply of 90-100 million board feet per year would draw the needed infrastructure investments. Steve Brink previously provided the Collaborative with information about what size forest materials are marketable for economically sustainable goals. The Collaborative could begin to develop a strategy for marketing forest materials and increasing the pace and scale of treatments. This strategy will likely utilize stewardship agreements to support biomass removal.

Some Collaborative participants expressed concern about utilizing a top-down, quota-driven formula to timber sales. Some participants noted that because timber prices vary based on the market for different species, maintaining flexibility for market variation is important.

A participant highlighted the importance of restoring forest resilience to historical levels by increasing the amount of fire on the landscape and cutting trees at a smaller diameter. He emphasized the critically important role of fire on the landscape and noted that surface and ladder fuels are the most problematic components of the current fuels profile.

One participant explained that the 30" dbh cutting limit was developed by a group of scientists in 1993 in an effort to cut back the understory and support the long-term reestablishment of fire-resilient forests composed of large trees. Considering stand diversity as well as tree size is important, particularly maintaining a multi-age forest.

On public lands, the 2004 framework provides minimal allowances for cutting trees greater than 30" dbh (in instances of disease, for example). Litigation set the dbh limit. The USFS is entering into forest planning in the years to come and will be engaged in conversations much like this one. Collaborative members can engage in the forest planning process to explore future changes.

Several Steering Committee members observed that SOFAR is focused on figuring out how to build consensus to advance efforts on the landscape. Members have different tools available to pursue ideas and efforts, including forest planning, for initiatives that may not be able to garner widespread support in the Collaborative.

Next Steps: The Landscape Vision Committee will present its work on desired conditions at the November Collaborative meeting. Additionally, in autumn 2017 the Collaborative will develop its goals and objectives for 2018. The Collaborative will continue to assess the range of tools available and points of agreement within the group.

Committee Updates

Landscape Vision Committee

The Landscape Vision Committee currently meets as three work groups: Desired Conditions, Spatial Needs, and Fire Response.

The Committee is reviewing the desired conditions document that the Desired Conditions work group created. The document highlights four zones, ranging from the defense zone to the far-out zone, and describes the desired wildlife, fire, and social conditions for each zone. The Committee will further discuss the document at its next meeting, and will seek full Collaborative input at the November Collaborative meeting.

In August, the Landscape Vision Committee held a field trip to visit a cross-section of the General Sherman project, with a sole focus on USFS portions. Participants looked at options and opportunities for work on the landscape.

Communications Committee

Julia Golomb shared an update on recent changes to the SOFAR Cohesive Strategy website (www.sofarcohesivestrategy.com), which she made in response to input received to-date. While Golomb manages regular site updates, Kendal Young and Lori Parlin will serve as a back-up website managers.

Many Collaborative participants regularly utilize the website, particularly to obtain meeting information and materials.

The Landscape Committee will develop recommendations on the function and design of the Landscape Committee page, including whether the page should be password protected or publicly accessible.

Funding and Finance Committee

The Funding and Finance Committee is seeking participation from CalFire, USFS, and other stakeholders. A Collaborative participant noted that USDA Rural Development and the State of California offer numerous loan guarantee programs. A participant also mentioned CalRecycle and tax incentives as possible funding sources.

Round Robin – Project News & Updates

SOFAR Partners provided the following updates and news on projects underway:

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) took over a portion of the Cleveland Ice House project, for a total of 600 acres of forest thinning and fuels reduction work. Yesterday NWTf commenced

treatment on 63 acres, at a rate of five acres per day. NWTF will also begin work on 32 acres of mastication by the end of September.

The Fire Safe Council received several large grants to continue its chipping program and for ongoing fuels work. There is also a new opportunity for prescribed fire training.

NWTF applied for \$488k in Proposition 1 grant funding to conduct hand work along water infrastructure for Grizzly Flat Community Services District.

CAL FIRE continues to work on the Highway 50 Fuels Reduction project. CAL FIRE needs to coordinate with Cal Trans and they need to identify a burn boss to conduct the pile burning.

Crews are under contract to treat the railroad corridor. The work has already proved useful as a fire break.

Crews are establishing a perimeter on the north end of Caples, to prepare for future burning.

A Collaborative participant spoke at the Region 3 and 4 Cal Water agencies meeting to raise awareness about the SOFAR Cohesive Strategy. Many people do not understand the connection between the upper and lower watersheds.

The Forebay Dam remediation project is moving forward.

Next Steps

The Landscape Vision Committee will next meet on September 27. An all-day field trip (open to the public) will take place on October 11, in lieu of a Collaborative meeting. Collaborative meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month, from 1:30-4:30. Visit the SOFAR website (www.sofarcohesivestrategy.org) for the latest meeting information and materials.

2017 Collaborative Meeting Calendar

- October 11 – ALL DAY FIELD TRIP
- November 8, 1:30-4:00
- December 13, 1:30-4:00

Always check sofarcohesivestrategy.org for meeting location and latest information.

September Meeting Participants

Kathy Smith	
Lori Parlin	
Mike Webb	CalFire
Norma Santiago	Catalytic Connections

Steve Brink	CFA
Dave Johnston	El Dorado County Air Quality Management District
Candice Thomas	El Dorado County Air Quality Management District
Brian Veerkamp	El Dorado Board of Supervisors, District 3
Dan Corcoran	El Dorado Irrigation District
Rod Pimental	El Dorado Northern
Gray Griffiths	Georgetown RCD
Kevin Vella	National Wild Turkey Federation
Jon Bertolino	Sacramento Municipal Utilities District
Andrew Bray	Sierra-at-Tahoe
Bob Johnson	Sierra Club
David Zelinsky	Sierra Club
Ben Solvesky	Sierra Forest Legacy
Craig Thomas	Sierra Forest Legacy
Chris Dallas	Sierra Nevada Conservancy
Chris Dow	Sierra Pacific Industries
Richard Thornburgh	U.S. Forest Service – Eldorado National Forest
Jennifer DeWoody	U.S. Forest Service – Eldorado National Forest
Dana Walsh	U.S. Forest Service – Eldorado National Forest
Mary Clarke Ver Hoef	Wrights Lake/Dark Lake Summer Home Association