



SNAMP Public Participation Team and Forest Service Meeting
Federal Building, 650 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, CA
January 27th 2009 from 1pm - 5 pm

In Attendance:

Jo Bridges
Mike Chapel
Chris Fisher
Lynn Huntsinger
Kim Ingram

Terry Johnson (by phone)
Kathy Clement
Susie Kocher
Anne Lombardo
Dave Martin

Beth Pendleton
Tony Rodarte
Kim Rodrigues
Adriana Sulak

I. Introduction: The meeting was facilitated by Kim Rodrigues. Introductions were made around the table. The goal of the meeting was to share the preliminary results of the UC Science Team's Public Participation Team research on public interaction with the Forest Service during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Team members observed Forest Service meetings using a structured protocol. Drs. Adriana Sulak and Lynn Huntsinger conducted interviews with participants and non-participants in SNAMP as part of a larger, interview-based analysis of the SNAMP process, and responses about NEPA and the Forest Service were presented at this meeting. A desired outcome is to develop a list of ideas of ways for the Forest Service to improve efforts to involve the public.

II. Public involvement research results: Researchers observed the NEPA processes for the Forest Service's Sugar Pine and Last Chance projects over the last 2 years. The research involved observing three fieldtrips and two meetings and interviewing 30 key informants. The interviewed group included five from the US Forest Service, six from the UC Science Team, five agency representatives from the MOU partners, six active participants, four lightly involved people, and four uninvolved selected to represent types of participants. Some interviewees were included if they were recommended by others. The research approach is qualitative. For this workshop, some numbers were teased out to help identify themes, although the numbers are not necessarily quantitatively representative of any larger group or population. If the quantitative results were to be inferred to a larger group, a larger sample would be needed. Based on observational and interview data, Drs. Adriana Sulak and Lynn Huntsinger, with contributions from the rest of the Public Participation Team, reported on Forest Service communications and meetings from the Sugar Pine and Last Chance NEPA processes.

Highlights of findings on the NEPA process:

- Though interviewee non-Forest Service participants may say they feel negatively towards the Forest Service as an agency, their actual experience with NEPA processes was generally positive. This concurs with the Public Participation Team’s observations of well-run meetings, strong leadership, convivial atmosphere, diverse views represented, and a focus on public interests.
- In general, those interviewed appreciated the existence of the NEPA process as an institutionalized requirement that gave them a guaranteed opportunity to comment, and most feel it leads to better decisions, though many do not think it is as good a process as it could be, often because they did not believe their comments were heard or used.
- Several respondents noted that one of the benefits of the NEPA process was networking with other people who cared about the topic.
- About half of those interviewed said they felt heard during the NEPA process.
- The group discussed ways to possibly document oral comments at meetings, and about how to respond to comments and use them in ways that made more people feel that their comments were heard and considered. Providing some networking time might also be a good idea.
- The group also decided to explore involving public affairs staff in the NEPA process.

Highlights of responses to questions about the Forest Service, Adaptive Management, and Forest Health:

- Though many respondents say they are in general concerned or frustrated with Forest Service management and responsiveness, they do appreciate Forest Service employees at the local level. Face to face, positive interactions are important to building relationships.
- A large number of the interviewees see the many barriers to Forest Service responsiveness as out of the local level’s control. Still, a continued and reinvigorated Forest Service effort toward respectful, consistent, sincere, clear, and simple communication could go along way with the public.
- Most realize that outside constraints on Forest Service management such as money, litigation and personnel changes are powerful and affect the agency’s ability to get their projects done and to respond adequately to the public.
- Some clarification of the role of science in decision-making would be helpful. Almost all respondents believed “adaptive management” was a good idea.
- The group felt it would be interesting to look at the variety of definitions of ‘forest health’ in conjunction with the Fire and Forest Ecosystem Health team. A few respondents believe the term “forest health” is code for “cut down trees”. Others responded positively to the term, and looked to historically more open forest conditions, or to sustainable management processes, as indicative of a healthy condition.

Discussion highlights:

USFS staff were interested in using the Public Participation Team’s meeting assessment tool as part of their ongoing quality assurance self assessment process. Other research-based suggestions can be implemented by the Forest Service as part of the SNAMP collaborative learning process

without affecting the UCST study design. These might include a more prominent role of Forest Service public affairs in key NEPA processes, an increased role for the internet for Forest Service document sharing and meeting information distribution, documenting oral comments, and an interest in extending pre-NEPA work with the public. It is hoped that further discussion will follow on these at an upcoming SNAMP Public Participation Team Integration Team meeting with the public. It would help to have Forest Service public affairs officers at the next meeting.

III. Next steps: Forest Service participants appreciated the informal setting and the opportunity to be the first to hear the candid results. Participants discussed how to share the information with the rest of the project. The general consensus was to have an Integration Team meeting on the entire public participation process of SNAMP not just on the NEPA process to present consolidated findings. It would include information on public participation, outreach opportunities and website use. It could also include when to use facilitation in the public process. Participants at this meeting will be asked to participate in an Integration Team meeting planning call in April. Notes of this meeting will be posted on the SNAMP website.