UPDATE: The challenge of maintaining UCST's role as a neutral third party of experts

November 4, 2008

As part of the Sierra Nevada Adaptive Management Project (SNAMP), the ten Principal Investigators who lead the UC Science Team (UCST) developed and signed a Statement of Neutrality, dated August 15, 2007, which defines the UCST's role as a neutral third party of experts and provides the means for external oversight and conflict resolution.

This Statement of Neutrality was designed to balance the fundamental principle of academic freedom with the need to maintain our neutrality with the public and legal controversies surrounding the management of US Forest Service lands in the Sierra Nevada.

In this Statement, we agreed to conduct our science and report our results through an open and transparent process. If differences exist in scientific interpretation and meaning based on the research conducted as part of SNAMP, we agreed to present the evidence and reasoning supporting each alternative conclusion.

We also agreed that to ensure our third party status we would not take positions in conflicts regarding Forest Service management on lands that are part of the SNAMP research design.

We have recently learned that a graduate student researcher on the UCST has made an expert declaration in an ongoing legal action that includes lands that are part of the SNAMP research design.

In response, we acknowledge the breach of the intent of our Neutrality Agreement. While the agreement was only signed by the ten Principal Investigators, it was our intent that researchers working for us would abide by the same points. We will endeavor to make it broadly understood that the expectations set forth in the Statement of Neutrality apply to all participants on the UCST.

We, the ten Principal Investigators on the UCST, restate our collective judgment that the impact of the planned Forest Service management on California Spotted Owl populations in our northern study site (i.e., the Last Chance Project) is a scientific uncertainty that must be empirically tested in order to draw scientifically defensible conclusions. This was our premise in our peer-reviewed workplan. It remains our position.