



SNAMP American Fire Field trip

US Forest Service Foresthill Ranger Station, Foresthill, CA. June 19th, 2014 9 am – 3:30 pm

In attendance:

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| Chuck Bacchi – unaffiliated | Pete Knell – Sierra Pacific Industries |
| John Battles – UC Berkeley | Susie Kocher - UC Cooperative Extension |
| Evan Begley- unaffiliated | Chuck Lorenson – unaffiliated |
| Vince Berigan – University of Wisconsin | Lynn Lorenson – Nevada County RCD |
| Jerry Bloom - unaffiliated | Victor Lyon – USFS Foresthill RD |
| Mike Bremmer - NRCS | Mary Mayeda - USFS |
| Roy Bridgman - USFS | Tony Mediati - Calfire |
| Bob Carroll – USFS | Rita Moriarty – unaffiliated |
| Martha Conklin - UCST | Ryan Olah – USFWS |
| Marie Davis – PCWA | David Passovoy - Calfire |
| Luana Dowling – Placer Firewise | Kelly Pavlica – USFS Foresthill RD |
| Matt Dunnahoe – PCRCD | Larry Peabody – USFS Foresthill RD |
| Peter Elias - unaffiliated | Karen Roshott – El Dorado Co. Teachers Ext. |
| Nick Entise – Sierra Nevada Conservancy | John Ruprecht – Dept. of Ag, Western Australia |
| Pat Ferrell – USFS, El Dorado NF | Richard Rypinski – unaffiliated |
| Patricia Flebbe – US Forest Service Region 5 | Evan Smith – Natural Res. Cons. Service |
| Chris Friedel – Camptonville Community Partnership | Ben Solvesky – Sierra Forest Legacy |
| Duane Frink – unaffiliated | Al Stahler KVMR-FM |
| Vince Griego – USFWS | Doug Tempel - University of Wisconsin |
| Rocky Gutierrez – University of Minnesota | Mariah Thomas – Sierra Nevada Conservancy |
| Don Harkin | Jamie Tripp – USFS |
| Tyler Harkness – Foresthill Fire | Tom Van Wagner – Yuba Watershed Institute |
| Richard Harper – Murdoch University, Australia | Karen Villalobos - Calfire |
| Christopher Hipkin – SFS | Dana Walsh - US Forest Service, Eldorado NF |
| Sam Huscher – UC Merced | Sheila Whitmore – University of Wisconsin |
| Peter Hopkinson – UC Berkeley | Ken Wilde – Sierra Pacific Industries |
| Kim Ingram – UC Cooperative Extension | Michael Woodbridge – USFS |
| | Peter Zellner - unaffiliated |

Welcome and Safety Review: Foresthill District Ranger Victor Lyons welcomed field trip participants, gave a brief safety talk and helped organize car pools out to the project site. The goals of the field trip were to observe how the August 2013 American Fire behaved within treated and untreated areas of the SNAMP study site; to seek input from stakeholders on whether they feel the treatments were adequate, too much or not enough; and to observe how the fire effected CA spotted owl habitat.

Stop #1 Treated Stand and American Fire: Larry Peabody explained that the American Fire started in the beginning of August 2013 in the north fork of the middle fork of the American River very rugged areas of the national forests, down in canyons that are difficult to fight. It moved out of the canyons and burned through part of the Last Chance project area. Much of the area it burned through had no fires for over 100 years.

This stop represented an area that was treated with ground-based thinning techniques. A feller buncher was used to remove smaller trees and left over activity fuels (limbs and tops) were piled and burned. As the American Fire moved through the landscape, it was determined that this area would be a good place to light a backfire in order to halt the progress of the wildfire. Firefighters had several days to get the area ready. They cut out additional brush and then started the burns at night. The backfire met the wildfire somewhere to the west. Though the backfire was successful in halting the forward movement of the wildfire, there were a high percentage of fir trees that experienced cambium layer kill due to the surrounding duff layers catching fire and burning/smoldering for long time periods. There is an intact seed source in the area and salvage logging will not occur at this site, although trees along the road will be removed if they are considered likely to fall across and block the road.

At this stop, John Battles explained how the SNAMP study design was affected by the American Fire. The Forest Team was 99% done with collecting post-treatment plot data within the Last Chance project area when the fire broke out in August 2013. So, studying the effect of the fire on the treatment area is not part of SNAMP (the final report will rely on modeling). But it is a great opportunity to study the real effects of fire since one treatment and control watershed burned in the fire and one treatment and control area did not burn. John has applied for a National Science Foundation Rapid Award to come out and measure the plots this summer before any salvage logging is done.

Field trip participants were given a post-treatment response survey to fill out. The purpose of the survey is to capture opinions of what a healthy forest is or is not and their opinions and reactions to observed fuels treatments. Responses will be used to help inform the SNAMP Public Participation Team chapter of the final report. Participants were asked to fill out similar questions after visiting each stop.

Stop #2 Untreated Natural Stand, Treated Stand and American Fire: These stands gave participants a good opportunity to observe side by side untreated vs. treated forest areas. The untreated stand was logged over 25 years ago and has not had fire on it for a very long time. The USFS estimates that there

are between 15 to 30 tons/acre of fuels here. The SNAMP Owl Team was asked if this represented good owl habitat. Rocky Gutierrez responded that it is a medium aged stand with residual old trees and it could be owl habitat – though currently no owls have been detected there. The treated stand experienced whole tree yarding, hand piling and burning of activity fuels. The smaller amounts of litter and duff here look more typical of an ‘after treatment landscape’. There is also more potential for species diversity now and in the future at this stand because of the bare ground in places. If a fire were to move through this stand, the USFS speculated that there would be less cambium damage to the remaining trees, and it would move fairly quickly through the stand. The stand that experienced the American Fire was also used as an area to light a back-burn because of the proximity to the road and the fuels reduction treatments that had occurred. There was less cambium damage at this stand than in the first stop and the area is showing an increase in species diversity.

Stop #3 Treated Stand and American Fire: This stand on about a 40% slope was treated by cable thinning with lop and scatter of limbs and tops. This is because it is not feasible to pull all the activity fuels out to the landing with cable yarding. The fuels had less than 2 winters to decompose. As a result, when the American Fire swept through this stand, it burned very hot and for a long time due to the relatively large amount of ground fuels. Though the trees looked green after the fire came through, most eventually browned out and died because their cambiums were scorched. Directly across the road, slope was less allowing the USFS to use ground based treatments rather than cable logging. The fire moved through there as well but there were fewer trees killed because there was less residual matter left behind. There was a discussion on what other options the USFS might employ in steep areas. Suggestions included increasing the slope threshold (currently 30% to 40%) that the forest uses for when cable logging must be used; taking more time to bring out and chip or pile slash from cable logging units; and suggesting that someone should invent a cable run chipper device.

Stop #4 Untreated stand and Meteorological station: This stand is untreated and is where the SNAMP Water Team has a met station. Martha Conklin and Roger Bales gave a brief summary of the work they are doing here and what the equipment is. Roger described the data collection with the station there and how it is adding real data to modelling leading to more certainty in water forecasting.

Doug Tempel and Sheila Whitmore from the Owl Team, described the effect of the American fire on the five owl territories (Two within and three within the perimeter). Three of those are nesting this year and one is occupied by a new sub adult. This year is a really good nesting year for the owls with high survival due to the mild winter. There are 27 nests in the whole study area with only 2 failed. 100% of adult pairs tried to nest this year, compared to less than 40% in a typical year. Surprisingly, one pair nested in a high severity fire area. Rocky Gutierrez added that there are studies showing high survival and good reproduction following low severity fires across broad landscapes including New Mexico, Southern California, and the Sierra Nevada. For high intensity fires, there is evidence that birds continue to use the area for foraging. The question is whether they continue to nest there for more than a few

years. There isn't enough information analyzed right now about the occupancy of birds in high intensity areas and so the long term effect on owls.

Wrap up: Susie Kocher thanked the group for coming and filling out the treatment survey. She invited the participants, many of whom were new to SNAMP, to participate in ongoing SNAMP events. The survey also included an evaluation of the meeting which is summarized below:

