



*Meeting of MOUP, UCST, and Bass Lake Ranger District Staff at the Bass Lake  
Ranger District  
9/07/06*

The following are the key agreements and a meeting summary that will be approved by all meeting participants and posted on the SNAMP web site for public comment.

**Key Agreements:**

- 1) As a team, the Memorandum of Understanding Partners (MOUP) and the University of California Science Team (UCST) reconfirmed that fisher research is feasible on the Bass Lake Ranger District (BLRD) in the proposed sites.
- 2) United States Forest Service (USFS) will clarify and confirm information that is for the public and information that is for UCST only.
- 3) All meeting participants agree to continue the policy of "checking in" with each other on a regular basis.
- 4) A point person at the Bass Lake Ranger District was assigned to each of the four UCST. They are as follows:
  - Fire and Fuels – Mark Lemon
  - Watershed – Phil Strand
  - Wildlife – Kevin Williams
  - Public Involvement – Trudy Tucker/Dave Martin
- 5) The November 1, 2006, MOUP/UCST meeting will also include District Staff Partners. Appropriate technology will be used when possible to connect to remote locations. An important goal in this meeting is the discussion of the timelines and budgets.
- 6) The teams will work to develop a consistent public message about the project and the sites. This will also include links to the Kings River activities when appropriate.
- 7) Local outreach regarding the project needs to happen before January 2007.

**Meeting Summary:**

Mike Chapel, the Regional Forester's Representative, noted his recognition and gratitude to the Bass Lake USFS staff for taking time from the field and fire season to make this meeting a reality and a true success. This sentiment grew throughout the day as the

meeting participants experienced the passionate commitment from all involved in the field visit.

From this meeting, the UCST began to understand and appreciate the constraints at the ground level associated with implementing Strategically Placed Landscape Area Treatments (SPLATs) and/or other management treatment protocols. The UCST continued to emphasize the need to ensure that what they are studying represents the “normal” routine management activities as guided by the 2004 Record of Decision (ROD). It was also reiterated that the Kings River treatments are too far along to adapt to the ‘04 framework guidelines (more about these treatments later in the discussion).

The meeting began with a discussion of expectations for the day. This included relationship building between the Bass Lake Ranger District (BLRD) staff and the UCST and MOUP, getting to know the local area, and getting a clearer picture of the future. Other expectations were discussed that focused on having a better idea of the budget by the Nov 1, 2006, meeting, more District-UCST exchanges, ensuring that connections/communication lines were established between Bass Lake staff and the UCST, coming up with a laundry list of needs, exploring similarities and synergy with Kings River Project, and beginning to determine housing needs/availability for research teams.

This was followed by a brief history of SNAMP and the Bass Lake Ranger District Fire prevention strategies and activities.

Following the 2001 US Forest Service Framework for the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the 2004 Amendment, the California Resources Agency and the US Fish and Wildlife Services decided with the US Forest Service (Memorandum of Understanding Partners/MOUP) that adaptive management with an independent third party would give the assessment of treatments proposed under the framework scientific credibility. In the meeting, it was discussed and agreed that “independent” is a more accurate term than “neutral” as the UCST is no more “neutral” than any other scientific team within the USFS.

Crawford Tuttle, Deputy Director of the California Department of Forestry (CDF), added that the State is most interested in the Adaptive Management, monitoring and engagement of the public in this process. He is gratified that we are finally here together at the district level.

It is believed that monitoring an adaptive management process is the best way to address a number of natural resource issues and create a transparent and accountable way to communicate with the public. From this, the primary driver for the development of the UCST, as the third party independent team, was to study the efficacy of SPLATs at the watershed/fireshed level(s) and the impacts on wildlife, water, and forest health, as well as the integration of the public within the adaptive management effort. The teams recognize that socio-economic concerns were not included as a focal topic in the original Memorandum of Understanding. The UCST would be willing to consider addressing the

socio-economic matters in the future. Given interest, current funding strategies will allow for socio-economic research to be added to the project once the core elements are funded.

This led to the development of a University of California Science Team (UCST) workplan to monitor US Forest Service treatments. Throughout the workplan development, the public was invited to comment on the proposed research both in stakeholder meetings and on the website. Following scientific peer review, in the spring of 2006, there was solid agreement on the intent of the proposed workplan by the MOUP and the UCST. The MOUP is currently working to secure the necessary funding and more fully develop specific work plans for implementation by January 2007, in hopes of beginning field work in summer 2007.

The rationale for the site selection began with an overview of the Sierra Nevada Forests. It was decided that given the biogeographic heterogeneity of the Sierra conifer forest, it would be important to have one site in the northern end and one site in the southern end. Because of the existing experimental work in the Plumas and Lassen National Forests, this area was excluded. The Forest was then analyzed district by district for status of their fire planning. It was important that districts would not be exceptional and would be representative of the seral stages, canopy cover, distance to urban areas, and plant communities in the Sierra Nevada. Also USFS district staff must be interested in the project. From this analysis, the Bass Lake and the American River Ranger Districts were chosen.

The participants then reviewed the history of fire salvage on the BLRD. Between the 2001 Framework and 2004 Amendment, the thinking at the BLRD underwent a great deal of change. As court cases were filed with the northern districts, US Forest Service Regional Office expectations were shifting. As a result, the BLRD fire staff developed a flexible approach to salvage.

Mark Lemon, of Sierra National Forest, then gave an overview of the current forest planning and implementation of SPLATs from the Forest Service perspective.

The purpose of SPLATs is to breakup the continuity of the forest in a cost effective manner with minimal impacts. SPLATs are not to stop fires but rather to redirect fires down from the crown of the trees to the ground. The results are a reduction of heat per area unit and the fires become less intense and actually move faster. The goal of SPLAT placement by the USFS is to choose the most effective pattern for a given forest. Generally 25-30% of the landscape is treated, though in some areas it has been as much as 50% at BLRD. It was remarked that generally 40% of the areas identified on the maps for treatment can actually be treated due to on-site constraints, etc.

One question that was raised asked is/are the current proposed treatment(s) truly testing the SPLAT theoretical guidelines. The answer was that the proposed treatments at BLRD include representative implementations of all relevant standard vegetation management practices defined in the framework. Specifically, SPLAT placements are defined by accessibility to treatments. These treatments include commercial harvest, mastication,

controlled burns, and hand work. Mastication of the sites reduces the standing fuels via a large brush hog type machine, followed by chipping them on site. After letting them sit for a year, they are then burned. The accessibility to SPLATS treatments will be part of the criteria that the UCST and the District consider as the work together to select the specific research sites among the candidate project areas.

In the BLRD, a real constraint to implementation of SPLATs is air quality control regulations that reduce the options on controlled burning. Dave Martin noted that the increased communication and collaboration with the air pollution control boards is a promising signal for the future potential of applied controlled burn treatments. It was also noted that the Joint Fire Science Project to monitor particulate matter would potentially inform this study.

The highest priorities for SPLAT placement and implementation are communities at risk. For instance, Cedar Valley was the first priority because of the single road in and out and the difficulty fighting the fire and protecting residents. At this point, Fish Camp has the least developed planning due to its location away from communities. The next step for Fish Camp will be to identify possible treatments and locations and then start adding constraints.

Another important decision element in SPLAT placement is the potential for timber sales to help offset the treatment costs to reduce the fuel loading. Current treatment costs @ \$250 to \$500/acre; commercial harvest can supplement up to half the costs. It is recognized that the appropriated dollars alone will NOT meet the balance of the treatment needs – therefore additional financial support is needed when the Forest Service plans these types of treatments This will be important for the Nov 1<sup>st</sup> meeting.

Overall forest health, not just fire safety, is also a driving force behind SPLAT strategies. “Protecting the communities from the forests...protecting the forests from the communities...”

In general, SPLAT placement and implementation are prioritized by:

- 1) What needs treatment without resource impacts (like Spotted Owl)?
- 2) Eliminate areas too steep for treatment. Locate any potential harvest revenue and plant types that can be masticated.
- 3) Determine what funding is available and what amount of harvest revenue can be projected.

One important question was raised as to defining if, and therefore, where might the public have influence in this decision making process for prioritizing SPLATs.

The group then discussed some of the challenges of SNAMP at BLRD.

- 1) Economics of Treatments: To date there are not enough appropriated funds and there is not enough timber value in sales from projects that contain SPLATs to support the gap in funding. In addition to the economic challenges due to high treatment costs, there are reduced options to sell commercial timber due to the

- declining infrastructure and lack of mills – only 2 small mills left now and this may be reduced to one – making competition impossible and further reducing timber sales returns/revenues.
- 2) **Timing:** This may be another constraint in this research effort due to the reality that it may require 3 to 4 years to treat even 40% of the areas planned for treatment. The Sugar Pine and Fish Camp National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents are due next year, so the District plans to initiate public scoping sessions associated with these projects in January 2007. It was discussed that while an Environmental Assessment is fine for local stakeholders, an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) may be required to address larger regional and state concerns. It was agreed that information from local scoping efforts will be shared with the UCST to inform us as to WHO has participated in the meetings thus far and who may be missing. Increased number of meetings and longer EIS process may need to be factored into the timeline.
  - 3) **Access:** It was noted that roads may need construction and actually reconstruction to access the treatment areas. While public concerns about road reconstruction do not currently seem to be an issue, funding is.
  - 4) **Socio-Political:** The Forest Service raised the concern that the higher visibility of SNAMP may attract more regional and national attention, and potentially that could result in more conflict. Overall, however, the FS is hopeful that as a result of the collaboration there will be increased funding to implement the treatments. Several Forest Service participants expressed concern about how badly the treatments are needed.
  - 5) A concern was raised by a PSW scientist that the funding for this project detracts from already stressed budgets, and that they got the impression that the attitude was that UC science is "better" than Forest Service Science.

Several research questions were then discussed:

- 1) The science team noted that the project is on the fireshed scale not the watershed scale.
- 2) It was suggested that the public issues between Sugar Pine and Fish Camp should be rather similar.
- 3) Dave Martin encouraged the UCST to consider the Sugar Pine Project since it is furthest along in terms of treatments, layouts, etc.
- 4) Fishers have been spotted in the Off Highway Vehicles (OHV) areas, and Reg Barret feels good about this habitat for fishers after the site visit.
- 5) The UCST reiterated that it is committed to integrating lessons learned from Sagehen, Quincy Library Group, Kings River Project, etc. It will also be important for USFS Region 5 and the USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station (PSW) to continue to talk regarding the Kings River Project.
- 6) It was noted that the regional water quality control board has been cooperative and supportive.
- 7) USFS has received conditional waivers for their proposed treatments based on established Best Management Practices (BMPs). The UCST may want to better understand these BMPs and their relationship to stakeholder understanding and acceptance of treatments.

- 8) Within the Sugar Pine Project, a major consideration is the protection of Nelder Grove since it cannot be managed due to socio-political constraints, it must be protected...thinning in adjacent areas following framework guidelines is designed to offer this protection to Nelder Grove. One of the unresolved questions is “Do these proposed treatments truly reflect SPLAT guidelines or simply thinning from below?”
- 9) There is a shared goal of reducing fire risk and reintroducing balance in fuel treatments from traditional forest support groups as well as the local tribes.
- 10) A University of California Cooperative Extension activity needs to include the development of an “alphabet soup” publication to define acronyms and terms.
- 11) We seem to be ready to begin to discuss “triggers” and “thresholds”. BMPs may be useful in helping us understand potential triggers and/or thresholds?
- 12) It may be useful to explore what lessons from SNEP may assist us in the project?
- 13) Dave Martin is our lead contact for public participation efforts in this area, and he is confident that he has reached all interested parties in his management efforts. Trudy Tucker may also be available as the public affairs person to work with us.

The group then explored what information is needed for the next steps.

#### Information Needs:

- 1) The team needs the Fish Camp data as it may influence the UCST site selection, especially regarding the aquatic research focus of SNAMP. The apparent lack of headwater perennial streams in areas of Sugar Pine that can be treated is an issue; the UCST needs a treatment catchment with a perennial stream for the research.
- 2) Need more actual project level data, i.e., where potential SPLATs are to be placed so that they can be assessed regarding how they will meet UCST research goals. This will allow for mutual planning of SPLAT placement to maximize research goals.
- 3) Given the time frame of the Jan/Feb 2007 scoping; the UCST needs the PAC layers of data immediately. Water Rights data may also be important.
- 4) MOUP and UCST need to work now to map out staffing resource needs and timing before January 2007. It will be important to know the capacity and support from the MOUP (California Resources Agency and others) to help implement this project.
- 5) The UCST needs to document how it is maintaining its third-party, independent role throughout this process.