

Central Coast Fire Learning Network
August 4, 2008
DRAFT Minutes

Attendees:

Name	Organization
Hall, Brett	UCSC Arboretum
Haley, Val	Native Vegetation Network
Parker, Tom	San Francisco State University
Vasey, Mike	UCSC Environmental Studies
Schettler, Suzanne	Greening Associates
Gennet, Sasha	The Nature Conservancy
Rider, Joel	Self employed
Guerzon, Angel	Santa Cruz County Chapter, California Native Plant Society
Frediani, Jodi	Santa Cruz Group, Ventana Chapter, Sierra Club – Forestry Task Force
Waters, Peggy	Santa Cruz County Chapter, California Native Plant Society
Koester, Charles	Santa Cruz County Chapter, California Native Plant Society
Cheap, Vince	Santa Cruz County Chapter, California Native Plant Society
McGraw, Jodi	Sandhills Alliance for Natural Diversity
Hayes, Grey	Elkhorn Slough Coastal Training Program
Neubauer, Dylan	Self employed
Delgado, Bruce	Bureau of Land Management, Ft. Ord
McCabe, Steve	UCSC Arboretum

CNPS-CalFire-CDFG cooperation

Brett Hall reported writing Angela Peterson and email 2 weeks ago to explore increasing the cooperative relationship between CNPS and CalFire, especially in the wake of the Martin Fire and media coverage. He had not heard back from Angela by the time of the meeting.

Steve McCabe reported that he had drafted a response/letter to the editor to address inaccuracies in media coverage after the Martin Fire. However, this response had not been printed by the Sentinel.

Val Haley reported that she had been attempting to contact CDFG's Jeanine DeWald with no luck.

Jodi McGraw and Val Haley had both also attempted to contact Laurie Briden, unsuccessfully, but Sasha Gennet noted that TNC had been contacted by her in order to move forward their research. They also suggested Sarah Estella the botanist, CDFG botanist in Fresno, and Val would do so one week after the meeting.

Jodi Frediani suggested other CDFG folks to contact: Richard Fitzgerald and Terry Castner, who mostly work with timber issues.

Jodi Frediani reported that she and Betsy Herbert met with the Felton CalFire's John Ferrara about clarifying to the media some of the misconceptions related in the wake of the summer 2008 fires. He had indicated that it was not appropriate for CalFire to speak with the media at this time.

There was discussion by the group indicating that people felt comfortable using the Learning Network process to continue build cooperative relationships between all interested parties.

Action: Val Haley will speak with Sarah Estella about post fire work at the Martin Road Reserve.

Action: Val Haley will review Steve's letter; Steve, Brett, and Val will amend letter and work with CalFire and CDFG to further refine for possible submission to the media.

Action: Grey will work to invite CalFire and CDFG to participate in future Fire Learning Network meetings

Santa Cruz County Post Fire Publication

Jodi McGraw reported on the process of the County's post fire publication as follows: Matt Johnson drafted a publication and sent it to Jodi as well as Val Haley for review. It included sensitive habitat-specific information. Both Jodi and Val submitted comments which were incorporated by Matt; however, the improved draft was rejected by higher level planning department officials. The following version was much shorter, without much of the sensitive habitat-specific information. Jodi McGraw noted some grave concerns about the recommendations being applied in sensitive habitats such as the sandhills.

Jodi McGraw noted that a future addendum to the publication could clarify current concerns; this could be an expanded version to include much of the earlier version's information. Dylan Neubauer noted that an online version could be improved more immediately, if the County were interested.

Charles Koester noted that the Santa Cruz Sentinel had posted much good information in a post fire web blog.

Need for More Information

Attendees reported that Monterey County planning department was fielding many questions about clearing in Big Sur. Participants noted that the Santa Cruz County RCD recommendations would be good to distribute to others in the region as it is superior information to other information being generated. The Weed Management Area in Monterey County is using this Santa Cruz RCD information.

Santa Cruz County Habitat Protections

Attendees reported numerous concerns about sensitive habitat destruction outside of the 100' clearance buffer recommended by CalFire. Some of these violations had been reported to Santa Cruz County enforcement officials, but staff report being told to 'back down' on enforcement due to political concerns.

Attendees reported that Matt Johnson was looking into fencing issues that have also been reported in the wake of the fires.

Santa Cruz City Water Department Concerns: Erosion Post-Martin Fire

Jodi Frediani reported City concerns about fire fighting-originated erosion hazards affecting water supplies. She noted a bulldozer line originating from the Pine Ridge area potentially affecting Laguna Creek.

Action: Jodi will report back to the group about negotiations between City water department, CDFG, and CalFire regarding mitigating bulldozer impacts to Laguna Creek.

Laird Office Moderated Meeting: Research, Monitoring, and Fire Prevention

Jodi McGraw outlined the purpose of a meeting called by Assemblyman John Laird's office. Bonnie Holly, Laird's chief of staff originally organized the meeting, and Ali Spickler, another staff person was put in charge of logistics. Both staff people had inquired about what could be done with the sandhills sensitive habitat, in particular. The meeting was called for August 12, 1 p.m. in the County Building. The organizers wanted to help coordinate all activities in the wake of the fires. The invitee list was kept purposefully small as there was limited space in the venue; it included: CDFG, CalFire, Jodi McGraw (SAND), Chris Fischer (The Nature Conservancy), Bill Russell (San Jose State University), UCSC, and the Rural Bonny Doon Association (RBDA).

Jodi Frediani reported that 2 people from each of the organizations were invited to attend. Ms. Frediani had requested Ali to be more inclusive with her invitation list and will follow up with a call to Bonnie to strengthen that request.

Action: Jodi Frediani will speak with Bonnie Holly about including more key invitees.

Martin Road Ecological Reserve: Post Fire

Val Haley reported on various activities at the Reserve. She spoke with Laurie Briden who indicated that the CDFG would issue a press release announcing a 90-day closure of the Reserve – no trespassing, permit-only access. Trespassers would be subject to jail time and/or fines. Val was awaiting a letter from CDFG allowing volunteer access to allow building of an informational kiosk, etc; local CDFG staff were unresponsive, and so Fresno was contacted instead. Meanwhile, there as a network of volunteers working at calling game wardens whenever trespass occurred.

Val had asked US Fish and Wildlife’s Connie Rutherford about the status of a \$1,000 grant. Ms. Rutherford noted that the funding was re-routed to recover the recently listed polar bear. Lacking this grant, Val noted that the local fire team, RBDA, and/or other volunteers would raise the funding necessary to do fuel modification work, especially at the base of the ‘Moon Rocks.’

Val was asked about these fuel modification activities, which included removing litter in the vicinity of Santa Cruz cypress trees, etc. She reported that there were no detailed written plans on these activities available for the group to review.

Since the fire, Dick Arnold has found Mt. Hermon June Beetles at the reserve.

Knobcone Pines: Planted post fire?

Jodi Frediani asked the group if they had heard of the WPA planting knobcone pines after fires in the middle of the last century.

Grey Hayes reported that Bonny Doon residents had told him of collecting knobcone pine cones to sell to CDF. Ostensibly, these collected cones could have been used for plantings, but he noted that the species is fire dependent and would germinate, perhaps apparently as if planted, after a fire.

Mike Vasey noted that all of the locations he has seen knobcone pine in the area were ecologically logical.

Suzanne Schettler had interviewed a friend years ago who had spoken with the Secretary of the Forestry History Association: this person confirmed aerial seeding of knobcone pine in the wake of fires. Unfortunately, this source has since died.

Post Fire Planting Recommendations

This discussion centered on Santa Cruz RCD recommendations about post-fire plantings.

Suzanne Schettler wanted to clarify that there are no plants that are truly fire safe, and that such speculation could be dangerous.

Mike Vasey was concerned about recommending any non-natives for planting as we are sometimes slow to realize the invasive potential of such species.

Brett Hall noted that there were several species on the list which were inappropriate for obvious reasons.

Val Haley noted that Neil Kramer had developed the plant recommendations list for the Martin Fire, generated from his original species list for the ecological reserve.

Action: Suzanne Schettler will take the lead on collating any edits from reviewers. Angel, Brett, Mike, and Suzanne will work on the developing recommendations to amend the list.

Federal Funding, Large-Scale Post Fire Response/Planning

Grey Hayes outlined his discussions with the NRCS about the potential for post-fire funding for the Central Coast. Immediately after the fire, staff with the NRCS inquired into the availability for federal Emergency Watershed Response funding. This funding is typically available in the wake of fires in areas that are especially erosion and fire prone; it funds work to stabilize soils in areas of critical safety concerns. Upon examination, NRCS staff realized that the Central Coast areas were surprisingly rated low on the fire danger spectrum by CalFire. In contrast, other areas of California have much more severe fire, erosion, and safety concerns. NRCS will continue to examine fire danger data with CalFire looking for areas where funding could be applied to increase human safety and decrease severe erosion danger.

Jodi Frediani noted that redwood areas are less fire prone because of shading.

Sasha Gennet noted redwood ecosystems in more fire-prone areas such as the Ventana Wilderness might be more vulnerable to frequent fire.

Val Haley noted that shrub increase creates increased fire risk. Mike Vasey noted also that California chaparral distribution is mainly on the fringe of maritime influence- not near the coast.

Research

Val Haley noted that there is not a sufficient network for all researchers to know what is occurring with research.

An unrecorded participant noted that CDF Felton is considering hiring a scientist/researcher.

Mike Vasey gave an outline of Tom Parker and his research. He has the following needs: property boundary data, fire perimeter and intensity data. The research is looking at the effects of the fire on various plant community assemblages including those including Santa Cruz cypress groves. They are asking how do these assemblages recover in response to various burn regimes. They have data on pre-fire locations of sensitive species, in particular, which they hope to be able to set up plots to follow their recovery over time.

Tom Parker reviewed some of this same research, focusing on seed bank work. He noted that through serendipity a student had collected seed bank from plots prior to the fire and can then monitor said plots post fire to see how the seed bank responds. Three areas of seed bank had been collected: litter, 1-3 cm depth, and 4-5 cm depth. With such data, he hopes to be able to model how different areas will recover post fire.

Dr. Parker also noted that he hopes to look at areas with vehicular impacts, taking plugs of soil from natural areas and distributing them in areas of impact. Such simple practices may or may not be useful in helping post fire recovery. Valerie Haley noted that there were two larger fire breaks to examine the aforementioned seed bank plug experiments and suggested that researchers compare plugged and unplugged areas. The group agreed that the various central coast fires along with corollary impacts provide a landscape scale potential for research into fire fighting manipulations. Such manipulations might include pre-fire forest thinning and other fire breaks, etc.

The group discussed important data sets to track for the Martin Road fire. Grey mentioned the potential to use data collected by Chuck Stein during the fire, which potentially recorded fire intensity. Also, Casey Stewman and Julie Evens had collected some data on plant community composition and distribution at the reserve prior to the fire, though unclear what year. Valerie Haley had mapped all plant communities as well as recording some rare plant locations.

The Nature Conservancy's Sasha Gennet noted that currently, research at the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve is occurring through her organization in conjunction with the California Department of Fish and Game. Both organizations are concerned about region-wide fire issues. Sasha noted that she is new to The Nature Conservancy. She also noted that the Conservancy is offering some support for communication and research in maritime chaparral especially in support of the conservation of biological diversity. Sasha has been in communication with many scientist experts in this system and is working to apply their recommendations at the Reserve.

Other issues discussed:

- Concern about how much heat soils were subject to in the fire; Dr. Parker noted that it all depends on the soil texture.
- Hope that research can help inform the final management plan for the Reserve
- Concern that research is coordinated so that research plots will not overlap and affect results.

There were no action items.

The meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.

DRAFT