

VTAC Meeting Minutes

August 12, 2011

Mendocino National Forest Supervisor's Office
Willows, California

Attendance

The following VTAC members attended the meeting:

Mike Liquori (Chair), Dr. Kevin Boston, Richard Gienger, Peter Ribar, Dr. Matt O'Connor, and Mark Lancaster.

The following VTAC agency representatives attended the meeting:

Bill Stevens (NMFS), Bryan McFadin (NCRWQCB), Bill Short (CGS), and Pete Cafferata (CAL FIRE).

Attendees:

Crawford Tuttle (CAL FIRE) and Duane Shintaku (CAL FIRE). Dennis Hall (CAL FIRE) participated by conference line.

[Action items are shown in bold print]

VTAC Announcements

Richard Gienger announced that AB 380, titled the "Comprehensive Forest Land Recovery and Restoration Act," is currently placed on approved suspense file in the Senate Appropriations Committee. Information on this bill is posted online at:

http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/postquery?bill_number=ab_380&sess=CUR&house=B&author=chesbro

Bill Stevens informed the VTAC that developing an HCP for an individual plan is currently the only real option for adequately addressing incidental take for listed fish species for restoration projects, such as placement of large wood in a channel as part of a THP. He said this may not be a huge additional cost, but would take longer for approval. Duane Shintaku added that not all landowners want or need this level of assurance from NMSF regarding incidental take.

Discussion on the Revised VTAC Pre-Consultation Guidance Document

Prior to discussion, the VTAC read over revisions to the March 24th version of the VTAC pre-consultation guidance document developed by Mike Liquori, and subsequent revisions produced by Peter Ribar and Pete Cafferata. Peter Ribar summarized the rationale for this voluntary form and stated that no formal agency approval will occur with this document. Duane Shintaku stressed that CAL FIRE reviews submitted plans (THPs, NTMPs, etc.) and will not review pre-consultation documents (i.e., the pre-consultation form will not be a CAL FIRE document). He added that the pre-consultation document should be considered an informal, optional

form that RPFs can use to document their preliminary work, and then circulate for feedback from the reviewing agencies to raise their comfort level regarding potential for section V project approval. Numerous suggestions for improvements were voiced by the group, including:

- Add an “instruction section” separate from the form itself at the front of the document stating its purpose and stressing that it is an optional tool available to RPFs/landowners.
- Move “project objectives” to the first page of the form.
- Move the “project context” section up to near the front of the form.
- Modify the Issue Summary Table (aka “scorecard”) so that only the main Review Team agencies are listed, with blank spaces provided for additional agencies, as appropriate.
- Add an “agency contacts list” section to the form, including phone numbers.
- Make it clear that the RPF/landowner will document the findings of the pre-consultation process, not CAL FIRE.
- Add “if desired, attach any letters or documentation provided by the reviewing agencies.”
- Flesh out the “general project information” section so that it is more user-friendly.

Mike Liquori captured suggested changes real-time with a laptop computer version of the draft document projected to the group. He stated that he will send out a new draft for VTAC to review prior to the next meeting.

Potential Sources for Obtaining Watershed Context Information

Dr. Matt O’Connor provided the VTAC with a handout listing several information sources for obtaining background watershed condition information. This list includes: anadromous salmonid recovery plans (e.g., CCC coho salmon), private timberland company HCPs, North Coast Watershed Assessment Program (NCWAP) reports, RCD watershed assessments, sediment TMDL studies, and other individual watershed studies (e.g., Redwood National/State Parks reports).

Numerous suggestions were offered by VTAC participants for expanding/improving the list, including:

- Provide weblinks for the various documents in the final list produced for RPF use.

- Investigate whether the UC Davis Natural Resources Project Inventory (NRPI) would provide additional useful documents (see: <http://ice.ucdavis.edu/project/nrpi>)
- Include temperature and other impairment parameter TMDLs as well as sediment.
- Use bibliographies included in multi-species recovery plans for potential sources of information.
- Use the CalFish website for watershed condition data (see: <http://www.calfish.org/>)
- Use the KRIS watershed online sites for watershed condition data (see: <http://www.krisweb.com/>)
- Ideally, it would be beneficial to have a map displaying the locations of the various data sources/watershed studies.

Matt O'Connor stated that if VTAC participants have additional suggestions for how to make a more complete list, send them to him (matto@oe-i.com). The final list will be included as an appendix to the VTAC report/guidance document.

Update on Sound Watershed Consulting's USFS SBI Grant Deliverables

Mike Liquori stated that Phase I of the USFS SBI contract that he is working on with Dr. Doug Martin recently closed out, and that Phase II grant money has not been applied for yet. Sound Watershed Consulting has approximately 90 days to submit a final report to the USFS for Phase I work. Mike expressed that he wants to get the draft document out for review, since parts can likely be used for the VTAC guidance document. **He will distribute the draft document in the next few weeks, with discussion on the document to occur at the next VTAC meeting (document to distributed/posted on the VTAC ftp site by September 2nd).**

Discussion of the "Take-Home Messages" List from the SDSF Meeting

Following the field meeting held on Soquel Demonstration State Forest on June 21, 2011, a list of "take-home messages" were prepared and included in the meeting notes. The revised list will be used to help with development of the final VTAC guidance document. Specific comments on the list included:

- Incentives are not part of the Section V rule language and proposed practices must be based on improvements to fish habitats. Incentives could be handled through an HCP for an individual plan.
- The word "incentives" will be necessary for small landowner involvement in Section V projects.

- The issues regarding proper incentives for Section V projects need further discussion prior to final VTAC agreement.
- Default acceptable actions (i.e., approval of Section V projects without considerable agency questions) will require appropriate “situational sentence” ideas, suitability criteria, design criteria, and effectiveness monitoring criteria.
- Two main options are available to identify default acceptable actions: (1) identify actions that are appropriate, then specify the situations where they can be applied, or (2) identify situations where actions can be applied, then specify which actions are appropriate.
- Section V requires the proposed practice to provide equal protection to that provided by the standard rule, which will necessitate a site-specific analysis and limits over reliance on “default acceptable actions.” Reliance on detailed analysis and modeling is better than making the process overly prescriptive.

Discussion on Revisions to the Draft Pilot Projects Guidance Document

Mike Liquori stated that the current vision for the pilot projects guidance document includes three main approaches for plan proponents to satisfy 14 CCR 919.9 (v)(3):

1. Use of the set of matrices provided in the original draft pilot projects guidance document.
2. Use of “situational sentences” to identify situations where actions can be applied, and then specifying appropriate actions. Three to four common examples are to be provided.
3. Use of watershed analysis by expert users.

The guidance document will list and describe general approaches to use, criteria for justification, resources/tools available for the analysis work, and templates for reporting results of the analysis. Regarding approach No. 2 above, specific suggestions from VTAC participants included:

- The VTAC guidance document should provide common examples (i.e., situations) of actions that landowners could use to improve salmonid habitats, including before and after photographs (i.e., we will show examples of actions that the VTAC deems to be acceptable). At least 3 to 4 scenarios are to be provided (anticipated scenarios include increased large wood loading, improved riparian conifer tree growth rates, reduced risk of catastrophic wildfire in interior areas, and improved nutrient loading).
- The VTAC guidance document should include a list of questions an RPF/landowner should address in their analysis for a specific type of project action illustrated with the common scenarios.

- The guidance document should include “watch-out” issues/conditions, including high gradient stream channels, downstream infrastructure, large stream bankfull width/drainage area, potential for take of listed fish species, etc.

Mike Liquori stated that he would work with Pete Cafferata to organize the real-time notes he took on his laptop computer and that a revised pilot projects guidance document would be sent out to the VTAC prior to the next meeting.

Discussion of Potential Pilot Project Locations

Mike Liquori informed the group that the Water Gulch THP being prepared on Jackson Demonstration State Forest (JDSF) in the Chamberlin Creek watershed may provide an opportunity to demonstrate an application of Section V rules and act as a pilot project. Further discussion will occur with JDSF staff to investigate whether this is an appropriate site, or if other upcoming JDSF timber sales would be more appropriate. Additionally, Mike stated that Green Diamond Resource Company has continued to express willingness to work with the VTAC on two potential pilot projects.

Next VTAC Meeting Date

The next VTAC meeting date is set for September 9, 2011, with the location to be determined.