

vTAC Meeting Minutes

February 18, 2011

Mendocino National Forest Supervisor's Office
Willows, California

Attendance

The following vTAC members attended the meeting:

Mike Liquori (Chair); Dr. Matt O'Connor, Richard Gienger, Dr. Kevin Boston, Peter Ribar, Mark Lancaster. Dave Hope participated by conference line.

The following vTAC agency representatives attended the meeting:

Pete Cafferata (CAL FIRE). Bryan McFadin (NCRWQCB), Drew Coe (CVRWQCB), and Stacy Stanish participated by conference line.

Attendees:

Crawford Tuttle (CAL FIRE), Bill Snyder (CAL FIRE).

[Action items are shown in bold print].

Guiding Principles for the vTAC

The vTAC briefly reviewed the revised vTAC guiding principles that Mike Liquori and Pete Cafferata modified following the last vTAC meeting. There was general agreement with all of the guiding principles, except for No. 1.F.—“Develop guidance that identifies approaches ranging from site-based to watershed-based for both watershed-scale and local limiting factors for listed anadromous salmonid fish species.” Peter Ribar suggested changing “local limiting factors” to “local constraining factors,” since conducting an adequate assessment for limiting factors can be complex. **It was agreed to use the new language and a revised version is now posted on the vTAC ftp site at:**

<ftp://frap.cdf.ca.gov/pub/incoming/vTAC/>.

Update on the Development of vTAC Outreach Survey

Mike Liquori stated that he had hoped to have a finished product available for review, but online survey technology difficulties prevented him from doing so at the current vTAC meeting. **Mr. Liquori will endeavor to have the survey out to vTAC members during the week of February 21st for their review (one week), prior to widespread electronic distribution.** Mike will use the free Survey Monkey software program (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>). Peter Ribar suggested that, additionally, there should be a downloadable pdf version available for small landowners, with that data manually entered into Survey Monkey to allow survey statistics to be generated for the entire data set. Mike is intending to develop a two-minute video presentation (subject to overcoming several technical issues) to introduce the topic to survey participants (rather than using a “dry”

abstract introduction). The goal is to have survey data to present at the next vTAC meeting in the second half of March. There was also discussion regarding possible avenues for promotion of the survey, including the upcoming annual CLFA meeting and the March BOF meeting. It was suggested that the survey be distributed using: (1) the email list compiled by CAL FIRE's Chris Browder, since it incorporates all the major stakeholders in California forestry, (2) the BOF's email distribution list, and (3) CLFA's membership email list. Richard Gienger and others also suggested sending it out electronically using the Salmonid Restoration Federation (Dana Stolzman, Executive Director), Coho Recovery Team (Dr. Stephen Swales, DFG, Chair), and NMFS CCC Coho Recovery Plan (Charlotte Ambrose, lead staff) email lists.

vTAC Guidance Document Outline

The group discussed the revised vTAC guidance document outline dated February 11, 2011 (posted on vTAC ftp site at: <ftp://frap.cdf.ca.gov/pub/incoming/vTAC/>; file name is Expanded vTAC outline v2). Pete Cafferata stated that this version of the outline was produced by integrating the earlier version of the outline produced by Mike Liquori, Peter Ribar's suggested outline provided at the last meeting, 14 CCR § 916.9 (v) rule requirements, and vTAC Charter language. He provided a brief summary of each major section of the outline, which was followed by group discussion and suggested changes.

Section I, Introduction.

It was suggested that language be provided stating that this is a guidance document and not meant to replace the actual rule requirements.

Section II, Proposal Processing.

Under "Description of pre-consultation needs/benefits," Stacy Stanish stated that she would be willing to provide detailed information on pre-consultation needs for the DFG written concurrence option for site-specific measures (no longer to be referred to as the "side-door" option). There was considerable discussion regarding how much information on Section V goals should be included in the processing section, including how they are going to be interpreted by the agencies and how they can be met by plan proponents. Peter Ribar, for example, provided a detailed riparian functions matrix (posted on the vTAC ftp site) listing ASP rule goals/objectives, beneficial functions of the riparian zone, and evaluation criteria for each key riparian function (biotic/nutrients, heat, water, wood, and sediment). There was disagreement, however, regarding whether this level of information should be provided in the processing section. To address these concerns, Mike Liquori added a new section in the outline covering Section V goals and objectives.

Section III, Project and Site/Watershed Descriptions (Design Phase).

Many of the bullet points in this part of the outline come directly from the Section V rule language itself (highlighted in red font). Under the bullet point for “Description of the evaluation area,” it was suggested that information required for other types of agency permits should be included (i.e., Conditional Waiver, General WDRs, 1600 permit, etc.), including the CalWater planning watershed number. Mike Liquori added a new bullet to the outline for “general project information to facilitate all required permits.”

Section IV, Analysis Phase/Analytical Procedures.

The revised outline closely follows the outline provided by Peter Ribar, providing a simplified standard approach and a more detailed customized approach. There was discussion whether “site-based” and “watershed-scale” would be better terms to use than “standard approach” and “customized approach,” and whether “watershed assessment” would be better than “watershed analysis.” In the former case, it was agreed to keep standard and customized, and in the latter, there was general agreement to keep “analysis,” since it is more rigorous, can be applied at the appropriate scale, and allows specific modules to be applied where appropriate. Detailed discussion of analysis procedures was delayed to the afternoon when the pilot projects interim guidelines document was covered.

Section V, Post-Plan Approval Phase (for all projects with a full evaluation).

This section covers implementation, short-term effectiveness, and long-term effectiveness monitoring. Bill Snyder stated that the vTAC needs to think about how to integrate monitoring work for Section V projects with existing agency monitoring requirements already in place (e.g., Work Completion Reports done by CAL FIRE, Conditional Waiver monitoring required by the CVRWQCB). It was also suggested that monitoring requirements should be agreed to during pre-consultation and that sub-sampling for effectiveness monitoring is appropriate. Mike Liquori stated that monitoring requirements need to be integrated with newly immersing programs such as the BOF MSG’s Effectiveness Monitoring Subcommittee and the JAG’s proposed Redwood Region Consortium (implementing the JAG research framework). Richard Gienger suggested that the group review the monitoring requirements in the former rule 14 CCR § 916.11.1 (Monitoring for Adaptive Management in Watersheds with Coho Salmon) and see what parts of the rule language apply to Section V monitoring.

Following the review of the guidance document outline, Mike Liquori stated that the main topics in the outline could be used to form vTAC subcommittees, such as: (1) Processing/site description, (2) Analytical procedures at watershed and site scales, (3) Monitoring (not urgent at this time), and (4) Pilot-projects. There was disagreement regarding the utility of forming subcommittees vs. “a committee of the whole,” and the benefits of rapidly moving ahead with pilot projects without a well developed guidelines document. Bill Snyder argued that we need interim

guidance for plan proponents currently developing projects, providing more “structure” to the current process. **Ultimately, only one vTAC subcommittee/ task force was assigned at this meeting. A “Processing—Pre-Consultation Task Group” was formed consisting of Peter Ribar, Bryan McFadin, Drew Coe, Stacy Stanish, and Pete Cafferata. The group is to develop a detailed description of pre-consultation needs and benefits (e.g., what do the agencies want to see for pre-consultation, when do they need the data, etc.). Also, a revised guidance document outline reflecting the changes suggested at this meeting will be posted on the vTAC ftp site prior to the next meeting.**

vTAC Pilot Projects Interim Guidelines Preliminary Draft Proposal

The vTAC considered the Pilot Projects Interim Guidelines document dated February 16, 2011 following lunch (posted on vTAC ftp site at: <ftp://frap.cdf.ca.gov/pub/incoming/vTAC/>; file name is vTAC Interim Guidelines 021611 Draft). Mike Liquori produced this document, stating that it uses the concepts shown in the PowerPoint presentation he gave at the vTAC meeting held on January 14th (i.e., a modified watershed analysis approach). The working concept is that the interim guidelines can be used for implementing Section V pilot projects that are undertaken in the summer of 2011, with feedback from these projects used to improve the final guidance document. Both a “default design process” using a structured classification system for RPFs with training, and a more flexible “customized design process” requiring more data and expertise are presented in this document. Major steps using the default design process include: (1) evaluating existing site conditions (i.e., riparian stand and geomorphic classification), (2) identifying functional objectives (applying the ratings made in step 1 to identify functional objectives for the riparian design), and (3) developing site prescriptions. A functional priority rating scheme exists for large wood, water temperature, nutrients, and erosion. There are four protection levels available for each riparian function: protect, maintain, improve, or generally available (i.e., not limiting). At the site-level scale, functional priority is rated against site condition for each riparian function, using the four protection levels.

After quickly reading through the document, the vTAC critiqued the document. It was generally agreed that the structured default design approach described is consistent with the rule language and provides a framework that can be made to work. Peter Ribar stated, however, that the geomorphic assessment may be difficult for some RPFs to perform successfully. Mike Liquori and Drew Coe responded that simple stream classification systems exist and are routinely used in Washington. Richard Gienger stated that what RPFs are currently required to do in 14 CCR § 916.4(a) is not given sufficient standards for presentation in this approach (i.e., a qualitative framework), but others felt that the qualitative descriptions provided in THPs related to this rule section are of minimal value.

There was some concern that it would be more consistent with the rule language to use “protect,” “maintain,” or “contribute towards restoration,” rather than “protect,” “maintain,” “improve,” or “generally available.” Mike Liquori informed the

group that the system requires further refinement so that the correct answer is produced by the RPF, and that this system does not provide prescriptions—it only indicates if opportunities for active management are available. Peter Ribar stressed that § 916.9(3)(A)4. must be met with whatever system is adopted by the vTAC (i.e., an identification of the potential effects to the beneficial functions, both positive and negative; RPF may use a reasoned analysis to describe the effects and may assign ratings of high, moderate and low to those effects that may individually or cumulatively limit anadromous salmonid distribution and abundance). There was agreement that training would be required for RPFs.

Mike Liquori suggested that further discussion/critique of this draft document should occur with email “threads”, as long as this approach is consistent with the requirements of the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act.

To further illustrate how this process could work, Pete Cafferata volunteered to produce a rapid illustration with the large wood placement project being planned for the East Branch of Soquel Creek on Soquel Demonstration State Forest in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Mark Lancaster also volunteered to provide an example using the Garden Gulch watershed (a tributary of Weaver Creek, which is a tributary of the Trinity River). Crawford Tuttle and Mike Liquori stated that it may be possible to critique the system with other potential pilot project sites (e.g., Swanton Pacific Ranch, the Garcia River, etc.) as well, and will coordinate to consider bringing one (or more) to the next meeting. Peter Ribar added that this system should be used for both obvious and less obvious riparian zone scenarios to provide a fair test.

Bill Snyder suggested using watershed-scale constraining factors denoted for the 28 focus watersheds evaluated as part of the Central California Coast Coho Salmon Recovery Plan for the watershed-scale assessment work (see NMFS 2010—see Chapter 10 and Appendix F, available online at: http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/recovery/Coho_Recovery_Plan_031810.htm). Matt O’Connor volunteered to provide a review of this information to the vTAC at the next meeting.

Next vTAC Meeting Date/Agenda

Pete Cafferata stated that he would send out another “Doodle” poll for acceptable dates for the next three vTAC meetings, aiming for meetings in mid to late March, April, and May. **When final dates are available, he will email them to the group so that vTAC members can get them on their calendars. Peter Ribar requested that material for vTAC meetings be supplied to members at least one week in advance of the meeting for adequate review.**

Agenda items for the March meeting include:

- Matt O’Connor—provide information review on the 28 focus watersheds studied in the CCC Coho Recovery Plan (NMFS 2010).

- The Pre-Consultation Task Group—provide preliminary information on pre-consultation needs and benefits.
- Mike Liquori—provide a summary of preliminary vTAC survey data.
- Mark Lancaster and Pete Cafferata—provide rapid tests of the Pilot Projects Interim Guidelines Preliminary Process for Garden Gulch and the East Branch of Soquel Creek, respectively.
- Mike Liquori and Crawford Tuttle—attempt to coordinate with additional potential pilot project landowners for rapid tests of the Pilot Projects Interim Guidelines Preliminary Process.