

vTAC Meeting Minutes

March 29, 2011

CAL FIRE Mendocino Unit Headquarters—Howard Forest
Willits, California

Attendance

The following vTAC members attended the meeting:

Mike Liquori (Chair); Dr. Matt O'Connor, Dr. Kate Sullivan, Richard Gienger, Peter Ribar, and Dave Hope.

The following vTAC agency representatives attended the meeting:

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

Attendees:

Bill Snyder (CAL FIRE), Duane Shintaku (CAL FIRE), Scott Kelly (TCF).

[Action items are shown in bold print].

Summary of the Initial vTAC Outreach Survey Results

Mike Liquori provided a summary of preliminary vTAC survey data resulting from an electronic survey sent to landowners, RPFs, agency personnel, and the public regarding their issues and concerns about using Section V of the ASP rules. The survey, along with an introductory video/PowerPoint, are posted at the following website: <http://calfirevtac.weebly.com/>. Additionally, survey results can be viewed at the following website:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=HRn896hkJzL_2bvNdT0Kwg9Cy_2fjQRMbPY9a3o6aapnakQ_3d. The group watched the five minute video/PPT that Mike Liquori produced and there was general agreement that it provides survey respondents with a good introduction to the topic.

Pete Cafferata stated that the survey was initially sent to Chris Browder's CAL FIRE Forest Practice and George Gentry's State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection email lists. At the time of the vTAC meeting, 84 people had provided responses; by April 1st the number had increased to 96. Using the updated data from April 1st available on the website above, 64% of the respondents were RPFs. Approximately 39% represented large, mid and small sized landowners, 29% agency staff, 23% consultants, 3% general public, and 6% other categories.

Since only 5% of the responses were from the public or advocates, VTAC representatives asked that a wider circulation of the survey notice take place. It was suggested that the following organizations receive the survey announcement: Salmonid Restoration Federation (Dana Stolzman), Mattole Restoration Council (Seth Zuckerman), Buckeye Conservancy (Ruthann Schulte), Northern California Council Federation of Fly Fishers (Mike Laing), Forest Landowners of California (Bill Keye), and the Sierra Club—

Sacramento Office (Michael Endicott). In addition, there were suggestions to send the document to Dr. Stephen Swales (Coho Recovery Team), Kevin Shaffer (DFG Program Manager, Native Fishes Management), Matt St. John, Angela Wilson, George Cella, Doug Cushman, and Mike Higgins (RWQCBs), Charlotte Ambrose (NMFS's CCC Coho Recovery Plan Coordinator), and Dr. Bill Weaver (Pacific Watershed Associates). Pete Cafferata agreed to send the survey announcement to all of these organizations or individuals (completed March 30th and April 1st).

The April 1st survey results show that approximately 92% of the respondents are either very or somewhat knowledgeable of the California Forest Practice Rules, and 77% have either detailed or moderate knowledge of the ASP Section V rule. Roughly 85% favor more flexible, professionally designed and site-based riparian protection zone treatments over a broadly applied rule, with 72% saying that treatments should be well-grounded in science. There is generally relatively "strong support" for the entire list of objectives related to site-based riparian management provided for Question 2 on page 2 of the survey, except for the response "Preventing application of Section V rules by all landowners." About 77% said that they are likely to support a landowner's ability to apply site-based riparian treatment through Section V rules if it is technically justified. The primary concern regarding the Section V rules is "too much uncertainty/inconsistency in interpretation." Approximately 51% felt that well documented examples of success will improve their comfort level in the use of Section V projects. Forty percent of respondents said they are highly or moderately likely to submit a Section V project (16% skipped this question). The primary reason why a landowner would be unwilling to submit a Section V project is "too much uncertainty in the process." Thirty-one percent either plan to submit or may submit a THP in the near future with a Section V project (28% skipped this question). Thirteen of 23 respondents to question 7, page 4, stated that they either were or may be interested in assistance from the vTAC on developing a Section V project.

Mike Liquori illustrated how the data can be sorted by specific categories with "cross-tabs" (e.g., by landowner size category). He stated that preliminary take-home messages from the survey include: (1) pilot projects are needed to demonstrate that the system works, and (2) we need to increase the level of certainty involved with the Section V process. It was agreed that a final summary listing common themes expressed in the survey is needed, but no formal paper summarizing results is necessary.

Test of the Pilot Projects Interim Guidelines Process Using Soquel Creek

Pete Cafferata provided a PowerPoint presentation illustrating how the vTAC Pilot Projects Interim Guidelines document can be used for the East Branch of Soquel Creek, located in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The PPT is posted on the vTAC ftp site at: <ftp://frap.cdf.ca.gov/pub/incoming/VTAC/> (the file is located in the VTAC PPTs folder).

Background information on the Soquel Creek watershed was first provided to illustrate watershed-scale limiting or constraining factors. The NMFS CCC Coho Recovery Plan includes the Soquel Creek basin as one of its 28 focus watersheds, and thus provided a considerable amount of information for this task (see: http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/recovery/Coho_Recovery_Plan_031810.htm).

Land use maps from the Coho Recovery Plan show that a large part of the watershed is residential or rural residential. The main portions that are not developed are in the East Branch watershed, largely made up of The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park and commercial timberlands, including Soquel Demonstration State Forest (SDSF). The NMFS CCC Coho Recovery Plan indicates that the East Branch watershed is the core area for recovery efforts in the basin. Large wood loading is very low in Soquel Creek due to extensive log removal efforts from the 1950s to the 1990s. Wood removal is related to problems that wood jams have caused to culverts and bridges during large floods, such as the January 1982 event. The CCC Coho Recovery Plan found that the basin has poor large wood loading and off-channel/ floodplain habitat, as well as poor estuary function.

Stand classification tools were then used to show that East Branch riparian zones below the Fern Gulch tributary have mixed hardwood and conifer composition, generally under-sized conifers for large wood function, and low mortality potential for coast redwood and Douglas-fir. Geomorphic classification methods revealed an unconfined channel with a gradient of 2-3%, leading to a determination of plane bed and forced pool riffle channel types. After using this data in the matrices included in the draft guidelines, segment objectives were found to include improving wood loading, maintaining shade for water temperature control, and protecting existing nutrient input. Site prescriptions included use of Late Succession Management Areas (300 ft on each side of the East Branch), required as part of the Soquel Demonstration State Forest General Forest Management Plan, and development of a large wood placement project, testing both unanchored and anchored wood installations. The wood placement study design calls for two sites with multiple clumps of unanchored wood using some logs with rootwads, and two sites with engineered structures described as log vanes. Also, the plan calls for building a backwater alcove in a disconnected side channel along the East Branch.

While the East Branch Soquel Creek project is not part of the adjacent Fern Gulch Timber Sale and THP, it was assumed for illustration purposes that the Fern Gulch THP would include the Section V site-specific practice of removing large conifers from the core zone to place in the channel. A simple table was constructed and shown in the PPT as an example of one possible method to address ASP rule 916.9 (v) (3)(A)4., which requires the plan proponent to identify both positive and negative potential effects to beneficial functions (rating effects as low, moderate, high, or not applicable).

Throughout this presentation, there was considerable discussion on approaches to improve the draft pilot projects guidelines. Key concepts discussed included: (1) the need for watershed limiting/constraining factors to be tailored to a specific basin (i.e., not be so broad as to apply to all North Coast watersheds), (2) the need to have the assessment conducted at the appropriate spatial scale, (3) the possible need for riparian stand modeling data for extensive projects, and (4) the need for improved language in the “segment objectives” matrix. Kate Sullivan suggested using the Washington Watershed Analysis technique of developing “situation sentences” for the boxes in this matrix.¹ Peter Ribar expressed concern over the possibility of being locked into specific prescriptions depending on the matrix box that is selected, as opposed to what makes sense on the ground. Richard Gienger suggested that the guidance document should include visual examples of what is described in the matrix boxes.

The group agreed that it was appropriate to develop stronger, more focused statements (“situation sentences”) for the segment objectives matrix, which in turn will lead to improved prescription development. **A new subcommittee was formed to undertake this task; volunteers included: Mike Liquori, Kate Sullivan, Dave Hope, Peter Ribar, and Pete Cafferata (Mark Lancaster was also appointed). Pete Cafferata will set up a conference call to initiate this process.** Appropriate temporal and spatial scales for use in this analysis work are also to be addressed by this group. There was concern over the lack of DFG involvement in this process due to limited budget and staffing. There was also discussion regarding the need for federal ESA coverage for vTAC pilot projects involving large wood placement in the watercourse channels.

Pre-Consultation Guidance Document Development

The vTAC Pre-Consultation Subcommittee provided a summary of the draft document they produced on pre-consultation needs and benefits related to Section V approval (the document is posted on the vTAC ftp site at: <ftp://frap.cdf.ca.gov/pub/incoming/VTAC/>). This document consists of a detailed framework produced by Peter Ribar and specific agency concerns related to Section V pre-consultation from the CVRWQCB (Drew Coe), NCRWQCB (Bryan McFadin), DFG (Stacy Stanish), and CGS (Bill Short). The goal of this document is to help plan writers to prepare for Section V pre-consultation with agency representatives. The specific agency concerns were included in the revised framework in bullet format. The subcommittee believes that the RPF needs to have prepared enough background material to have an intelligent discussion with agency personnel involved in the site inspection. This information will then be

¹ Situation sentences are specific prescriptions written for areas of the landscape included in the watershed analysis area that require protection measures beyond those provided by the standard Forest Practice Rules. For more information, see the Synthesis chapter from the Washington Watershed Analysis Manual at the following website: http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/fp_wsa_manual_section04.pdf

used to build a more complete technical justification for the actual plan that is submitted to CAL FIRE.

The subcommittee asked that all vTAC members and representatives review the draft document and provide comments to subcommittee members prior to our April meeting date. Duane Shintaku suggested that Pete Cafferata test the pre-consultation document on the East Branch of Soquel Creek, with the assumption that the large wood placement project would be part of the Fern Gulch THP.

Next vTAC Meetings

The next vTAC meeting is scheduled for April 27, 2011, with the location to be determined (likely to be Willows or Williams). Agenda items for the March meeting include:

- An update on the vTAC outreach survey results by Mike Liquori.
- An information review by Dr. Matt O'Connor on the 28 focus watersheds included in the CCC Coho Recovery Plan for possible use in identifying watershed-scale constraining factors as part of watershed-scale assessment work.
- A progress report from the vTAC subcommittee working on refinement of the Pilot Projects Interim Guidelines, including rewording of the matrices.
- An update on the vTAC pre-consultation guidance document and the test of the document on the East Branch of Soquel Creek by Pete Cafferata.
- A presentation by Mark Lancaster testing the Pilot Projects Interim Guidelines for Garden Gulch.

Additionally, the vTAC will hold a field meeting during the afternoon of June 21st at Soquel Demonstration State Forest to view the East Branch of Soquel Creek.