

VTAC Meeting Minutes

March 23, 2012

CAL FIRE Mendocino Unit Headquarters, Howard Forest
Willits, California

Attendance

The following VTAC member attended the meeting:

Peter Ribar (CTM).

The following VTAC agency representatives attended the meeting:

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

Attendees:

Dennis Hall (CAL FIRE), Chuck Ciancio (RPF, public).

GoToMeeting Webinar/Conference Line Participants:

George Gentry (BOF), Dr. Kevin Boston (OSU), Richard Gienger (public), Kevin Shaffer (DFG), Karen Carpio (DFG), Karen Mitchell (DFG), Bill Snyder (CAL FIRE), Duane Shintaku (CAL FIRE), and Clay Brandow (CAL FIRE).

[Action items are shown in bold print]

Discussion on the Revised VTAC Pre-Consultation Guidance Document

Pete Cafferata provided the group with a revised version of the VTAC pre-consultation guidance document reflecting the changes suggested at the last meeting and further changes suggested by Peter Ribar. The most significant new changes are: (1) adding WLPZ objectives for Class II-L watercourses on page 5, (2) referring to the 2012 Forest Practice Rule book at the bottom of page 7, and (3) altering Existing Condition Summary questions 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 on page 8 to align them with CCR 916.9(v) (3)(A)(2) requirements.

Pete Cafferata agreed to email out the March 2nd version of the document to the VTAC email list, as well as post it on the VTAC website and ftp sites. The group thought the East Branch Soquel Creek pre-consultation guidance document example was acceptable. The VTAC did, however, think that a simpler example would be beneficial for landowners, particularly addressing reduction of catastrophic fire risk. **It was decided that the VTAC would request that Mark Lancaster develop a simple example with fictional data.**

Discussion on the Revised VTAC Guidance Document

The majority of the meeting was spent reviewing the draft VTAC guidance document, including recent revisions and comments incorporated by Peter Ribar and Bryan McFadin. While not comprehensive (complete notes were recorded by Pete Cafferata in a hard copy of the document), some of the significant points raised for each section of the document included:

- Introduction:
 - Stress that watershed context/assessment is an important component in the introduction.
 - Remove the word “economic” when referring to incentives for landowners.

- Goals, Principles and Desired Outcomes
 - Change the first bullet under No. 1 to “facilitate project implementation and habitat restoration (rather than minimize barriers to entry).
 - Tighten up the “Management Objectives” section so it is more applicable for California.
 - Consider removing the last paragraph.
 - Finish Table 2 and reference it in the text.

- Pre-Consultation Guidelines
 - Add the March 2nd version of the pre-consultation document as an appendix.

- Conceptual Framework: Summary of Riparian Zone Beneficial Functions
 - Consider adding this long, detailed section as an appendix so it is available, but does not overly bog down the reader.
 - Stress the benefits of having a dynamic system for anadromous fish in this section (add emphasis on this concept).

- Introduction to Analytical Pathways—Recommended Approaches...
 - Move the watershed context paragraph to the start of this section, so that it applies to all three analytical pathways.
 - Add language indicating that both potential individual and cumulative effects (positive and negative) must be analyzed and that methods must be proposed to avoid or mitigate significant adverse impacts.
 - Refer to “tools” as assessment techniques.
 - Explain how the assessment techniques can be practically used by field RPFs.
 - Take the bullets and expand on them, so that they fit the items in the large table better, or drop the bullets and incorporate them into the large table.
 - Address shade, temperature, and macroinvertebrate issues as suggested by Bryan McFadin.

- Pathway 1) Standardized rule matrix
 - Stress that this approach is appropriate for short reaches (e.g., 1000 ft), not for large watershed assessments (e.g., 22 sq mi).
 - Provide more information on how an RPF would use the categories listed (e.g., conifer >70%).
 - Explain how an RPF would use the Bilby and Ward figures.
 - Refer to “Relative Stand Density”, not Relative Stocking Level (too confusing with FPRs dealing with stocking requirements).
 - Under Eco-Geomorphic Hotspots, refer to SWC (2008) and see how Class II transitions were referred to in that document; refine as appropriate.

- Label the various matrix tables, then describe how to use the tables in appropriate paragraphs.
 - Make the tables more “user-friendly” (e.g., define C, S, D, etc., so the reader does not have to search for what these codes mean elsewhere in the document).
 - Provide footnotes for web postings of papers that explain how to use items in the tables (e.g., Montgomery and Buffington 1997); also post the papers on the VTAC BOF website.
 - Provide a nomograph example of how to use this approach (possibly the East Branch Soquel Creek example).
- Pathway 2) Situational scenarios
 - Under step 2, make it clear that treatment types will enhance desired ecological functions.
 - Add channel structure/pool creation to “wood loading.”
 - Provide a weblink to a map of the area covered by the ASP rules.
 - In terms of examining trajectory of stand conditions, stress that stand projection modeling is not expected or required.
 - Remove the “overlap in curves identifies removable trees available” bullet on page 28.
 - For the “Headcutting and/or Incised Channels” category, make this topic more specific to the Sierra Nevada/Cascade Range (indicate that it is not as important in the Coast Ranges).
 - Under “Riparian Communities with Low Wood Loading”, add the language suggested by Peter Ribar.
 - Attempt to get additional photographs illustrating the ideas presented in the text.
 - For “Interior Stands with High Catastrophic Fire Risk”, state that typical suitability is for areas outside the zone of coastal influence, and add “negatively affecting microclimate conditions” to “Hazards.”
 - Under “Relatively Closed Canopy Riparian Corridors Lacking Nitrogen-Fixing Species”, add forester to expertise likely required, and add the Wilzbach et al. 2005 study or another appropriate study as an example situation.
- Pathway 3) Expert Analytical Design Process
 - Remove “expert” from the title.
 - Fix cut off bullet points in Figure 1.
 - On page 41, remove “we” and make the writing consistent with the remainder of the text.
 - Add “generalized” in the title for Figure 3.
 - Add the comments suggested by Bryan McFadin under the water temperature section.
 - Consider headwater stream temperature standards.
 - Mention NMFS SONCC coho recovery plan for intrinsic mapping under “watershed context.”
 - Write and include a short “riparian management objectives” section.

- Watershed Context Assessment
 - Move first paragraph to the “Introduction to Analytical Pathways” section.
 - Put the list of sources and websites in an appendix.

- Submission Requirements
 - Add language indicating that both potential individual and cumulative effects (positive and negative) must be analyzed.

- Proposal Processing
 - Provide an introductory paragraph explaining how the listed bullet points are to be used.
 - Add the five agency paragraphs regarding agency review after the bullet points; include titles of individuals, not names.
 - Prior to the five agency write-ups, provide a single paragraph explaining how the proposals will be reviewed by the Review Team agencies, identifying differences between the agencies, and what the various agencies focus on when reviewing proposals.
 - **The Water Board paragraphs are to be retooled to fit the format of the other agencies.**

- Monitoring Strategies
 - To be reviewed and expanded on at a later date.

Pete Cafferata and Mike Liquori will generate a new version of the guidance document and post it on the VTAC ftp site prior to the next meeting.

Discussion of Potential VTAC Pilot Project Locations and Landowner Outreach

Pete Cafferata provided a short PowerPoint presentation on potential pilot projects. To date, two potential projects have been identified: one with Collins Pine Company and one with Green Diamond Resource Company. Other companies recently contacted include: Big Creek Lumber Company, Timber Products, and The Conservation Fund.

The Collins Pine plan is THP 2-12-002 (submitted to CAL FIRE), denoted as Swamp Creek, and located in the Deer Creek drainage in Tehama County. RPF Andy Juska is willing to amend the plan to biomass thin a white fir area in the WLPZ to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Approximately 5-10 acres have been identified in the plan area along Swamp Creek by Mr. Juska. Maps and photos of the potential sites were shown as part of the PowerPoint.

The group was positive on this potential project, reasoning that Highway 32 located along Deer Creek could present a high risk of ignition. Additionally, this project ties in with a proposed aspen enhancement project that is part of the THP (i.e., it would be beneficial to prevent the aspen area from potentially burning). Kevin Boston asked how the RPF would demonstrate that fire behavior will be modified—will fire behavior models be used? It was agreed that pre-consultation for this potential project would be beneficial. **It was decided that the VTAC would inform Mr. Juska that we are interested in his project and that he**

should review the VTAC pre-consultation form, filling in the relevant portions. Agency input on pre-consultation would then be provided. **It was suggested that VTAC members and agency representatives participate on the pre-consultation, not on the THP PHI.** Bill Snyder suggested that the VTAC needs to provide landowners with training prior to full launching of the guidance document.

The Green Diamond Resource Company (GDRCO) project is under development by Dr. Lowell Diller. Dr. Diller summarized the project at the BOF's Research and Science Committee meeting held in Davis on February 24, 2012. The GDRCO aquatic HCP calls for adaptive management and provides for incidental take of listed anadromous salmonids. This project will be conducted under the HCP and will investigate how to best manage WLPZ riparian areas in the zone of coastal influence. The basic question is: Are dense (95%) overstory canopy closure conifer stands in riparian areas ideal for fish growth? This study will build on the results of an earlier similar smaller scale research project conducted by Dr. Peggy Wilzbach (Wilzbach et al. 2005) that showed adding light had a significant effect on fish parameters. Four Ah Pah Creek sub-basins that drain into the Klamath River will be used as the field sites. The project will create openings in riparian stands to add light and stimulate red alder growth, providing additional nutrients. A complete project proposal will be available from GDRCO shortly. This is a large scale project that will take several years to complete.

Technically, an area with an approved HCP does not require a Section V site-specific proposal, but GDRCO is interested in pursuing this with the VTAC. The VTAC was receptive to using this study as a pilot project, but recognizes that this is not a typical project that would apply to other landowners. **There was encouragement to continue to search for additional pilot projects with other landowners, such as Big Creek Lumber Company and Swanton Pacific Ranch, and to send them the pre-consultation document for their review.** It was also suggested that Chuck Ciancio's 13 acre NTMP located in Humboldt County could possibly be used as a pilot project for small nonindustrial landowners.

Mr. Ciancio provided the group with several handouts regarding his experience from nearly 50 years in the field dealing with rural landowners and fisheries issues, including a detailed write-up on the Little River watershed located in Humboldt County. He stated at the VTAC meeting that it is appropriate to be moving towards site-specific management in WLPZs and away from mandatory fixed zones. Chuck added that RPFs will need training on how to use the new information being developed by the VTAC.

Next VTAC Meetings

The next VTAC meeting is scheduled for May 4, 2012, tentatively in Willows. The exact location and agenda will be emailed to the group when the information is available. The following meeting will be in June, with possible meeting dates of June 26 or 28th. **Please inform Pete Cafferata which of these two dates works best for your schedule.** This meeting may be a field meeting to Mark Lancaster's parcel in Trinity County near Weaverville. A second meeting in June may also be scheduled as a webinar, as the VTAC nears its deadline to complete its tasks.