

# VTAC Meeting Minutes

February 3, 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, Mark Lancaster, and Dr. Matt O'Connor.

The following VTAC agency representatives attended the meeting:

Bill Stevens (NMFS), Bill Short (CGS), Bryan McFadin (NCRWQCB), and Pete Cafferata (CAL FIRE). Kevin Shaffer (DFG) and Dr. Stephen Swales (DFG) participated by conference line.

Attendees:

Bill Snyder (CAL FIRE), Duane Shintaku (CAL FIRE), Dennis Hall (CAL FIRE). Mike Bacca (CAL FIRE) participated by conference line.

**[Action items are shown in bold print]**

## VTAC Announcements

Kevin Shaffer announced that the public draft of the Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast (SONCC) Coho Salmon Recovery Plan is available for review (see: [http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/recovery/soncc\\_draft/SONCC\\_Coho\\_DRAFT\\_Recovery\\_Plan\\_January\\_2012.htm](http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/recovery/soncc_draft/SONCC_Coho_DRAFT_Recovery_Plan_January_2012.htm)). Comments will be accepted through March 5, 2012, but there may be a time extension granted.<sup>1</sup> Kevin encouraged the forestry community, and specifically the BOF and CAL FIRE, to comment on the document. It was agreed that while the VTAC itself will not be able to provide direct comments on the document, it will be included as a reference to consider when preparing a Section V document (under the watershed context assessment chapter heading).

Kevin also informed the VTAC that it should review the California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM), stating that it provides standardized current condition and change projection methodologies, as well as standardized terms. He added that the VTAC may want to consider including a reference to CRAM in the VTAC guidance document. CRAM is a standardized tool for assessing the health of wetlands and riparian habitats, and has been used considerably in the

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<sup>1</sup> Later, NMFS staff announced that the SONCC coho salmon recovery plan comment period was extended to May 4, 2012.

Bay Area and in southern California (for more information, see: <http://www.cramwetlands.org/>). Bryan McFadin stated that CRAM is relevant for 401 certification, but has not be used in timber conditional waiver/WDR permitting.

### **Discussion on the Revised VTAC Pre-Consultation Guidance Document**

New versions of the pre-consultation guidance document and the guidance document filled out with the East Branch of Soquel Creek example were provided to the group. Our goal is to find that delicate balance between simple and comprehensive; we don't want to overwhelm potential users with excessive documentation requirements. Mike Liquori and Pete Cafferata explained that only small changes were made since the last VTAC meeting held in December. Several suggestions were made to improve the example, including:

- Provide watershed-wide maps for watershed context purposes.
- Add weblinks to documents used to complete the guidance document.
- Add a limited number of pre-project photos.
- Add a limited number of diagrams showing the types of work to be completed.
- Remove pages 1 and 2 (background information on how to complete the guidance document).
- Add a shaded text box at the beginning of the document providing context for the example:
  - The box should remind landowners of the benefits of more information and remind agencies of the benefits of less information.
  - Describe that the maps and information are sourced from existing documents (not new materials).
  - Include a statement that Soquel Creek is a data-rich site, with this project having an unusual level of collaboration from multiple parties (heavy agency input on project design).
  - Provide an estimate of the time it took to compile the example.
  - Include caveats about data due to downstream resources.
  - Add a statement regarding the benefit to the landowner.

**It was suggested that Mark Lancaster develop a simpler example for a data-poor site situation.**

Duane Shintaku suggested changing the term "Proposed Project" in the main pre-consultation guidance document to "Site Evaluation and Conceptual Actions" or "Proposed Site-Specific Measures" or "Site-Specific Proposal" to avoid legal challenges with the CEQA definition of project or permitting confusion ("project" would apply to the entire THP). The VTAC agreed with this suggestion.

**Pete Cafferata and Mike Liquori volunteered to make these changes in both the pre-consultation guidance document and the East Branch Soquel Creek example, and then email them to the VTAC for their review and comment**

**(with a request for comments back by a specific date). The pre-consultation guidance document will not be on the VTAC agenda at future meetings.**

### **Discussion of Potential VTAC Pilot Project Locations and Landowner Outreach**

Bill Snyder announced that Gary Rynearson, GDRCO, informed him that Green Diamond is willing to conduct a VTAC pilot project on their timberlands in Humboldt County. Dr. Lowell Diller, GDRCO, is developing a large scale research project to test impacts of riparian canopy manipulation on fish response, and sites associated with this study will be submitted as a VTAC pilot project.

Duane Shintaku and Pete Cafferata stated that SPI does not appear able to provide a field location for a VTAC pilot project, after discussions with SPI's Ed Murphy. Other landowners with possible projects include: The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, Big Creek Lumber Company, Timber Products, Timber Vest, Bar 717 Ranch, and Mark Lancaster's parcel in Trinity County. In particular, at least one fuel treatment project is needed for the interior part of the state.

**Mike Liquori, Pete Cafferata, Bill Snyder, Bill Stevens, and Mark Lancaster agreed to form a subcommittee to work on contacting potential landowners for pilot projects. Mike and Pete will assign specific landowners to be contacted by each subcommittee member during the week of February 6<sup>th</sup>.**

### **Burney Gardens Meadow Restoration Project Summary**

Bill Snyder and Mike Bacca summarized the Burney Gardens meadow restoration project for the VTAC. The meadow restoration work is being conducted as part of a large THP (2600 ac) in northeastern California, and provides an example of analogous process for a VTAC project. Partners in the project included PG&E, SPI, WM Beaty & Associates, and Fruit Growers Supply Co. A primary goal of the project is aspen restoration through harvest of invading lodgepole pine and other conifer species. Only limited income from timber harvest will be realized with this project. The THP allowed for CEQA coverage and contained the DFG 1600 agreement; additionally a 401 certification was obtained from the CVRWQCB and a binding wetlands agreement was received from the USACE. This project involved a considerable amount of pre-consultation work with the various agencies, demonstrating its value. The project was attractive to the landowners because of the large amount of grant funds available and RCD assistance. Approval was aided by the lack of listed species present (no federal nexus for incidental take needed) and the project location—outside of an ASP watershed.

### **SBIR Phase II Grant Discussion**

Mike Liquori led a discussion of the SBIR (Small Business Innovation Research) Phase II grant proposal that he and Dr. Doug Martin are considering applying for

shortly (due March 1<sup>st</sup>). Mike and Doug received a Phase I grant to develop processes for active riparian management, some of which have been included in the working draft of the VTAC guidance document. Up to \$450,000 is available from the Phase II grant over two years, which would be split between Washington and California if the grant is received. Mike asked the VTAC what researchable questions could be posed for the grant application related to active riparian management in forested watersheds. Responses included:

- Develop cost effective monitoring methods (how to measure response).
- Partner with Dr. Lowell Diller, GDRCO, on their study in Humboldt Co., particularly looking at correlations between canopy, shading, and water temperature.
- Improve the standardized rule matrix tables included in the VTAC guidance document (validate and test the tables for California watersheds).
- Examine the trade-offs involved with fuel treatments in riparian areas.
- Determine effective ways to increase landowner outreach.
- Consider ecosystem service models as a way to increase landowner incentives and improve the overall financial viability of commercializing opportunities.
- Investigate tax incentives for active riparian management.
- Facilitate various fee waivers or other policies (may involve lobbying the legislature).
- Explore the concept of TMDL “credits.”
- Develop approaches for long-term rotation age incentives (benefiting fish).

**Mike asked that additional ideas be forwarded to him and Dr. Martin rapidly.**

### **Review of the Working Draft Version of the VTAC Guidance Document**

Pete Cafferata stated that he had made minor revisions to the VTAC guidance document, reflecting suggestions made at the December VTAC meeting. VTAC participants offered several new suggestions. They included:

- Peter Ribar informed the group that he has suggested language changes that he can incorporate in the document (e.g., for the standardized rule matrix—how to aggregate stream reaches, provide channel width definition, improved stocking level definitions, chart explanations, etc.).
- Bill Stevens suggested adding a brief description of listed fish status, and potential conflicts with timber operations in the document’s opening paragraphs.
- Mike Liquori suggested adding a clear statement of section V goals and objectives in the beginning of the document.
- Duane Shintaku suggested improving the section of the document addressing incentives for landowners to participate in section v projects

(ideas included listing funding resources available, using conservation easements and grants, and clarification of where costs may be offset with timber harvest). More specifically:

- One idea included a “certified (guaranteed) design”, which might be a programmatic, independently audited program that provides design/planning services to the landowner that are subsidized by other sources – similar to “RCD partners in restoration program” – outreach and technical support.
  - Eliminate prohibition of “state funding for mitigation.”
    - De-couple riparian improvements from mitigation.
  - Eliminate prohibition against fee offsets across departments (e.g., CAL FIRE grants covering 1600 permits fees, etc.).
  - “Restoration” costs 10-25x the cost of improvements (benefits) associated with THP/harvest operations – strong incentive for State (and/or others) to encourage.
    - Every harvest NOT utilizing improvement strategies is a lost opportunity, and such opportunities accumulate every year.
  - This list should be filtered to identify those items we can include in the guidance document v. those that we may need to take back to the Board.
- Peter Ribar suggested including the link for the Wood for Salmon Workgroup in the guidance document (see: <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/woodforsalmon>).

It was also suggested that training presentations should be made to organizations such as CLFA, FLOC, etc., as well as state and federal agencies, to explain the guidance document. Review by forestry consultants should also occur prior to release of the document to the public. Bill Snyder suggested focused outreach to landowners, similar to what the Wood for Salmon Workgroup is attempting to accomplish.

**The VTAC agreed to accept all the track changes in the working draft of the guidance document (dated 01-31-12) and post a clean copy on the VTAC ftp site (<ftp://frap.cdf.ca.gov/pub/incoming/VTAC/>). VTAC participants are to download the document and insert their suggested modifications with Track changes into this version, allowing all comments to be inserted into one version of the document. Pete Cafferata asked that the document remain in the Microsoft Word 2007 format (.docx) to reduce the file size. When a VTAC participant has the file downloaded for revision, a Word document titled “VTAC Guidance Document Currently Under Revision” should be posted on the ftp site to alert others that it is currently unavailable.**

Bill Stevens stated that he has a NMFS jeopardy “flowchart” that may be appropriate to include in the guidance document. **Pete Cafferata will email the flowchart to the VTAC email list when he receives it from Bill.**

**Bill Short will write a short paragraph describing how he envisions CGS will review a Section V proposal, as an example for the other Review Team agencies. Bill will send the paragraph to Mike Liquori and Pete Cafferata, who will edit it and forward it to DFG, NCRWQCB, CVRWQCB, and CAL FIRE managers for development of a similar paragraph for their agencies. Included in these paragraphs will be a list of agency contacts for Section V review.**

### **Next VTAC Meetings**

The next VTAC meeting is scheduled for March 23, 2012 at Howard Forest (CAL FIRE's Mendocino Unit Headquarters located near Willits).

**Pete Cafferata volunteered to schedule the following two meetings with a Doodle poll.** One of these meetings may be a field meeting to Mark Lancaster's parcel located near Weaverville. Mike Liquori suggested possibly using "Google Plus" for future meetings (web conferencing like "Go To Meeting"). **Mike will investigate whether this will be available for the March 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting.**