

# VTAC Meeting Minutes

June 25-26, 2012  
Weaverville, California

## Attendance

The following VTAC members attended the meeting:

Mike Liquori (SWC-Chair), Peter Ribar (CTM), Richard Gienger (public), Dr. Kevin Boston (OSU), Dr. Matt O'Connor (OEI), and Mark Lancaster (5C).

The following VTAC agency representatives attended the meeting:

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

Attendees:

Bill Snyder (CAL FIRE), Duane Shintaku (CAL FIRE), Dennis Hall (CAL FIRE), and Claire Lindstrand (5C).

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

## **I. Summary of the Weaverville Field Sites Visited by the VTAC on June 25th**

The main purpose of the first day of this VTAC meeting was to provide field sites to view and discuss topics that will assist the VTAC in finalizing the VTAC guidance document. A brief summary of the discussions and “take-home” messages from the field portion of the meeting are provided below.

### Stop 1. West Weaver Creek Habitat Improvement Project

The group viewed a location on West Weaver Creek where a 8 foot CMP was removed and replaced with a 24 foot open bottom arch in 2000, providing 2.4 miles of additional habitat for coho salmon and 3.5 to 4 miles for steelhead (Figure 1). The 2001 Oregon Fire burned most of the 3,000 acre watershed above the crossing. A recent winter storm event with a 1.2 year return interval mobilized 35-40 yr old alder logs above the crossing, but did not produce a jam at the open bottom arch. Riparian canopy above the crossing is good and natural wood jams currently exist in the system (Figure 2). Levees were constructed several decades ago, were rebuilt in 1994, and continue to constrain the channel above the crossing, limiting channel migration. Gold mining with dredging occurred approximately 150 years ago and heavily disturbed this watershed. Currently the channel is providing poor over-wintering habitat for anadromous fish. Possible restoration approaches discussed here included: (1) planting conifers in the riparian zone, (2) removal of levees to restore floodplain function, and (3) installation of large wood structures in the channel.

### Stop 2. East Weaver Creek Large Wood Installation Site

The next field stop was an East Weaver Creek site where large wood will be installed in the near future (Figure 3). A large sewer line passes under the channel and is currently

threatened by channel downcutting. Large wood will be installed in the channel to encourage floodplain meandering and deposition of sediment to bury the pipe. This will be the first wood installation project in the Weaver Creek drainage. Thirty to forty logs 40 feet long from the Weaverville mill will be used for the project. The group also observed the main stem Weaver Creek channel below the confluence of the two main tributaries (Figure 4). A temporary summer wood dam has been installed to produce a swimming hole. Water temperatures can reach 25°C (77°F) here, at or near the lethal range for juvenile coho salmon. Existing wood loading is very low in this part of the watershed and the channel would benefit from wood enhancement projects. Other watershed problems include extensive water diversions along East Weaver Creek, greatly reducing summer flow quantities, and barrier problems in Middle Weaver/Sidney Gulch.

### Stop 3. Sidney Gulch (Middle Weaver Creek) Barrier for Fish Passage

Sidney Gulch (Middle Weaver Creek) was observed along Weaver Bally Loop Road. Sidney Gulch has been identified as a priority watershed for coho recovery under the California coho recovery strategy due to the presence of year-over-year coho populations. The Sidney Gulch channel was first lined with concrete in the 1920's and this historical structure is currently protected (Figure 5). Concrete baffle structures were installed in 1996 but anadromous fish passage is severely limited and fish do not make it through this 1000 foot reach with any consistency. A habitat improvement project for Sidney Gulch is in the planning stages.

### Stop 4. Garden Gulch Tributary to Sidney Gulch, near the Lancaster Parcel

Mark Lancaster explained to the group that there is an 11 foot waterfall that limits anadromy on Garden Gulch (a tributary of Sidney Gulch) below his 40 acre parcel. The channel below the barrier has relatively deep pools and fine sediment loading is not excessive. A large landslide feature was observed below the road that occurred prior to 1985. As with other parts of the watershed, Garden Gulch was heavily disturbed by gold mining around 1850 and the original road was located in the channel.

### Stop 5. Lancaster 40 acre Parcel Observation and Discussion Summary

Mark Lancaster's 40 acre parcel has been logged selectively five times in the past. Mixed conifer species, up to 110 years old, grow on site II/III timberland. Due to the configuration of the parcel (660' x 2640'), up to 42% of the ownership can be considered to be within Class I ASP rule WLPZ boundaries. Timber growth is estimated to be 1-1.5% per year. The last wildfire occurred approximately 90 years ago. The main Class II channel that flows down into Garden Gulch was examined by the VTAC for several hundred feet (72 acre watershed). The January 1997 flood event (~40 yr RI) caused significant downcutting to occur. Significant pools were found in the channel in early June (Figure 6), but currently very few pools remain with surface water present. There was considerable discussion about whether this was a Class II-L or II-S, but the consensus was that it is a Class II-S due to very limited flow in mid summer, despite the significant channel dimensions observed and a small trickle of flow at the confluence with Garden Gulch. There appears to be little reason to propose a Section V project for a Class II-S to allow limited harvest in the 10 foot Core Zone to reduce the risk of

catastrophic wildfire; the exiting canopy cover in the WLPZ was estimated to be less than 70%.

The group then walked down to the Class I WLPZ and observed the canopy cover and stand stocking from a large ridge (possibly constructed for gold mining operations) protruding into the WLPZ. Parts of the riparian zone are dominated by alder stands (Figure 7), while other parts have large conifer snags and a mixture of conifer size classes (Figure 8). Mark Lancaster led a prolonged discussion on what could be proposed under Section V for this type of Class I WLPZ under small nonindustrial timberland ownership. We discussed the possibility of cutting large conifer trees and moving them off-site to channel locations with anadromy present, in exchange for an opportunity to conduct management in the WLPZ. This scenario is considered to be more feasible when logs would be moved from one site on a given ownership to another site on the same ownership. Possible incentives that could be used to entice landowners to take such a course of action were outlined. Mitigation banking was discussed as one alternative that is allowed under CEQA.

**The group decided that it would be worth having the VTAC outline a viable process that could allow small landowners to move wood off-site in exchange for added management opportunities within the WLPZ. Mark Lancaster, Mike Liquori, and Richard Gienger (as well as Duane Shintaku the following day) volunteered to serve on a VTAC Incentives Subcommittee to generate a short white paper documenting the issue and possible solutions.** A hierarchy of opportunities is to be included in the paper: 1) installation of wood on-site, (2) installation of wood off-site, but within the same ownership, and (3) installation of wood off-site, outside of the ownership, but in the same planning watershed. **The white paper is to be finished by July 20<sup>th</sup>.**

## **II. Summary of Office Meeting (Trinity Co. Office of Education) on June 26th**

The office meeting began with a short conversation on landowner incentives and offsetting mitigation, continuing the field discussion from the previous afternoon. Duane Shintaku stated that the existing CA Forest Practice Rules already incorporate the concept of offsetting off-site mitigation [e.g., 14 CCR § 913.1 (933.1, 955.1)(a)(2)(E)], and that CEQA fully embraces this concept. Other possible incentives for active management in WLPZs to enhance salmonid habitat under Section V, such as tax relief, mitigation banking, and regulatory permitting relief (e.g., exemption process to allow streamlined restoration work, programmatic permit, etc.) would require significant changes, and will be explored in the brief white paper to be developed by the VTAC Incentives Subcommittee established on June 25<sup>th</sup>.

Most of the meeting was spent reviewing the draft VTAC guidance document, including recent revisions and comments incorporated by Mike Liquori and Pete Cafferata. While not comprehensive (complete notes were recorded by Mike Liquori and Pete Cafferata), some of the significant points raised for each section of the document included:

## General Comments

- Add a glossary.
- Add more dialogue on incentives for landowners, explaining why Section V work is important for landowners and why it is important for the resource (i.e., salmonid stocks need rapid help).

## Executive Summary

- First paragraph—add “operational flexibility and benefits to landowners” to the last sentence.
- Change “pathways” to “options” in the summary table and text when referring to V(2) and V(3) ; use 916.9(v)(2) and 916.9(v)(3) in the table, not V(2) and V(3).

## Introduction

- Add to the second paragraph verbiage emphasizing that active management is needed due to the current poor condition of salmon stocks in California (urgency issue).
- First bullet: Change to “Guidance should provide approaches that are applicable to all landowners regardless of ownership size or permitting requirements.”
- Third bullet: Change to “Guidance should offer broad-based incentives to landowners to encourage use of Section V where appropriate.”
- Fourth bullet: Change to “Guidance must be environmentally beneficial and operationally feasible.”
- Sixth bullet: Change to “Guidance should seek to identify opportunities to streamline permitting requirements.”
- **Add a paragraph listing examples for the six situational examples, using bullet points (Mike Liquori has a list of bullet points from this discussion).**
- Figure 1: Make changes needed in the boxes, as discussed at the last meeting.
- Remove the last paragraph in this section.

## Goals, Incentives, and Desired Outcomes

- Rename this section; change it in the Table of Contents.
- Add an expanded incentives discussion to this section, based on the short white paper developed by the VTAC Incentives Subcommittee.
- Table 1: Change “level of protection” to “management.” Change wording in the “Generally Available” boxes.
- Make minor changes to the last paragraph.

## Conceptual Framework: Summary of Riparian Zone Beneficial Functions

- Add the map generated by Jonathan Ambrose, NMFS, for the Wood for Salmon Workgroup showing ownership within the Central California Coast coho ESU.
- **Add a final paragraph under the first section describing that listed fish species need added wood enhancement projects now to accelerate**

**recovery, due to declining salmonid stocks. Bill Stevens is to develop this paragraph.**

- Make minor change to the last paragraph on page 7.

### Introduction to Analytical Pathways

- Make minor changes to the brief descriptions of the three pathways.
- **Add Mike Liquori's list of bullet points on when to use pathways 1, 2, and 3 (i.e., they are most applicable in these cases...). Insert on page 11, and at the beginning of each pathway.**

### Pathway 1) Standardized Rule Matrix

- Define how “ $\geq 70\%$  coniferous species” is to be considered (canopy cover, basal area, stem count, etc.?).
- Relative stand density: remove “cohort” and make under minor changes.
- **Add a simple diagram illustrating confluence angles (Mike Liquori).**
- Alter the overview figure on page 16 to make it clearer to the reader.
- Table 2: remove the red arrow and box referring to Plane Bed channel types.
- Sub-section 2C—change to “Segment Decision Matrix.”
- Table 4: Title change to “Segment decision matrix.” Add the “restore” objective to the table.
- Sub-section 2D—change to “Segment Action Matrix.”
- Table 5: Title change to “Segment action matrix.” Change Segment Objectives to “Segment Actions” in the table.
- **Develop two examples: the East Branch Soquel Creek example for large wood enhancement (Pete Cafferata to develop and incorporate); Lancaster parcel for reduced catastrophic wildfire risk—Mike Liquori to assist Mark Lancaster.**

### Pathway 2) Situational Scenarios

- Add a flowchart showing steps 1-5.
- For every situation (1-6), add a hypothetical example, explaining what the advantages are for landowners (“what is in it for me?”).
- Under Situation 2 (headcutting/incised channels): Add a paragraph elaborating that this is a difficult situation to address and will likely require considerable extra expertise (refer the reader to Pathway 3).
- Replace the Figure 8 photo with an example that has a incised channel and an elevated floodplain that could be reconnected.
- Under Situation 4 (catastrophic fire risk), hazards sub-section, change bullet point to “risk to nearby dwellings or subdivisions.”
- Under Situation 6 (sediment reduction within riparian zones):
  - **Replace Figure 21 with a better photo of a crossing abandonment in the interior part of the state (Mark Lancaster to supply photo).**
  - Reword, recognizing that the topic is broader than just referring to roads, skid trails, landings, and crossings. In the first paragraph, broaden this

situation to include discussion on other erosion source areas in WLPZs, including: bank cutting, channel incision, channel diversion, unstable areas, etc. Include verbiage on potentially laying back oversteepend banks, bioengineering approaches for bank erosion, etc.

- Include a paragraph describing possible incentives for landowners to complete sediment reduction work in the WLPZ, providing a long-term benefit to watershed resources. This may include offsite mitigation (outside the plan area), which could possibly allow limited WLPZ harvest (offsetting mitigation). Consider adding a “benefit balancing crosswalk” that includes sediment reduction work in the THP area, within the ownership, in the planning watershed, and in the super planning watershed (~50K ac).
- **Under typical suitability criteria, Bill Short agreed to write treatment descriptions for unstable areas (e.g., using sub-drains, bioengineering approaches, etc.)**
- Under typical suitability, include a bullet point for repairing existing stream diversions or treating potential diversion sites.
- **Under treatment options, Mike Liquori agreed to add a paragraph with reference citations. This will include a description of the three treatment options available (source controls, transport controls, and mitigation controls). It will reference readers to existing documents that describe acceptable approaches for use in WLPZs (e.g., Riparian Restoration: Roads Field Guide ([http://www.fs.fed.us/t-d/pubs/pdf/hi\\_res/05771801hi.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/t-d/pubs/pdf/hi_res/05771801hi.pdf))).**

### Pathway 3) Analytical Design Process (Customized Design)

- Add a paragraph at the beginning of this section explaining how, where, when, and who should use this pathway. Explain that this pathway would not usually be used by small landowners, but rather by larger companies without an HCP. Pathway 3 will be used for very complex projects or for situations that differ from areas that perform as per “status quo” information.
- **Table 10: explain what mid valley, low valley, and confined/headwater mean so that the reader is clear on the meaning of these terms (Mike Liquori will provide this information).**

### Appendices

- Add a new Appendix E, “Definition and schematics for channel types.” Attempt to use DFG Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual (<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/fish/resources/habitatmanual.asp>) terminology and figures, not Montgomery and Buffington 1997.

### VTAC Pilot Project Update

Pete Cafferata provided the VTAC with the Collins Pine Company VTAC pre-consultation form filled out by RPF Andy Juska for a potential Section V site-specific proposal to mechanically thin and restore aspen along Swamp Creek, a tributary to

Deer Creek (as part of THP 2-12-002 TEH). Several suggestions for improvement were made:

- Make a better nexus between the site-specific proposal and listed anadromous fish stocks/potential improvements to the stream channel and aquatic habitat (page 13--“Key Assumptions of Proposed Benefits (to Anadromy).”
- State that the area to be treated has a continuum of ladder fuels, while other areas are not in the same condition.
- The watershed context assessment needs improvement and should not just repeat the cumulative impacts assessment language prepared for the THP.
- Consider including verbiage on nutrient inputs from aspen stands and the watershed benefits possible.
- Provide more specific information on how the site-specific proposal deviates from the standard rules.
- Check boxes that apply to aspen restoration, not just for fire hazard reduction.
- Provide a project title.
- Provide missing information on page 15 (Proposed Design Elements/Metrics/Standards). For example, this might mean: no mechanical harvesting closer than x ft from the WTL; retain x % overstory canopy; use existing skid trails no closer than x ft from the WTL; over x ft, x large trees will be removed; WLPZ canopy will be reduced x %, etc.)

**This information is to be shared with RPF Juska, along with the VTAC’s thanks for undertaking this exercise. The VTAC will ask Mr. Juska to consider revising the pre-consultation document. Mike Liquori asked Pete Cafferata to determine if Collins Pine Co. would be willing to host the VTAC for a site visit to THP 2-12-002 TEH in early August. This would include the Review Team agency pre-consultation team of Adam Wyman, Drew Coe, Stacy Stanish, and Don Lindsay. A pre-field meeting would be needed with the agency pre-consultation team prior to the field inspection. A conference room at CAL FIRE’s Tehama-Glenn Unit Headquarters in Red Bluff may be available for a brief indoor meeting prior to field inspection of the site.**

No new information has been received from Green Diamond Resource Company on their VTAC pilot project. Pete Cafferata will check with Gary Rynearson for an update.

### **VTAC Schedule**

**Mike Liquori stated that new version of the VTAC guidance document will be developed by the end of July, with the next VTAC meeting to be held in August. Pete Cafferata will circulate a Doodle poll for a date, following coordination with Collins Pine Company and the pilot project field inspection.** The goal is to finish the VTAC work by the end of 2012. Duane Shintaku suggested that the VTAC have 6 RPFs from CLFA and CFA peer review the document prior to finalizing it and presenting it to the BOF (i.e., usability check by practicing foresters). **Peter Ribar stated he would speak to Mike Tadlock, who is on the Board of Directors of CLFA, regarding this concept.** It was also suggested that a BOF workshop could be scheduled to receive feedback on the guidance document prior to finalizing the paper.



Figure 1. Mark Lancaster describing the open bottom arch structure built on West Weaver Creek in 2000.



Figure 2. West Weaver Creek channel conditions above the open-bottom arch crossing structure (wood accumulation, levees, erosion features, influence of wildfire in the upper basin, etc.).



Figure 3. East Weaver Creek, where a large wood installation project will be installed to encourage floodplain meandering and sediment deposition over a large sewer pipe buried underneath the channel.



Figure 4. Bill Stevens and Peter Ribar observing the main stem of Weaver Creek below the confluence of the East and West Branches, where a temporary swimming hole has been built.



Figure 5. Sidney Gulch (Middle Weaver Creek) cement-lined channel with concrete baffles; coho passage severely limited.



Figure 6. Class II watercourse observed on the Lancaster 40 acre parcel; site of significant pool in early June that is currently dry.



Figure 7. Alder stand along Garden Gulch on the Lancaster parcel.



Figure 8. Class I WLPZ along Garden Gulch on the Lancaster parcel; snags and a mixture of conifer size classes are present.