

Plumas County Tree Mortality Pre-planning Meeting

August 25th – 9:30 am to 11:30 am
204 Fairground Rd, Quincy, CA 95971

Introductions - Nick Dawson, Plumas County O. E. S

Mike Callaghan, Chair of the Plumas County Fire Safe Council

- Welcome and show of hands for organizations represented.
- Purpose of the meeting to discuss the science behind California's tree mortality and stakeholder perspectives.
- Outlined a brief history of the Tree Mortality Task Force: created by the state of California after 4 years of drought and high tree mortality. Currently the Task Force is overseen by OES and Cal Fire with involvement of 10 counties.

Danny Cluck, Forest Entomologist for Lassen National Forest presented "Tree Mortality Issues in the Sierra Nevada."

- The total tree count is rising. The last published number was 66 million since 2010, which does not yet reflect the most current counts.
- There are hundreds of different species of beetles which are often tree specific: Mountain Pine Beetle/Sugar Pine, Western Pine Beetle/Ponderosa, and Jeffery Pine Beetle/Jeffery Pine. Wood boring beetles are not generally an issue for tree mortality, but they are commonly confused with problem beetles.
- Beetle populations are growing because conditions are favorable, notably that forest stands are dense due to the absence of fire. Current conditions make the forests highly susceptible to wildfires, insects and disease.
- 2012 risk map for insect and disease in Plumas County shows modeling of areas that could lose greater than 25% forest density in a drought event.
- Tree mortality is not as severe as in past drought events (locally), but conditions are favorable for that to change.
- Plumas County is in a "moderate" situation – the majority of tree mortality is less than 10 trees per acre. Extreme drought effects are in the Southern Sierra where there are areas of greater than 60 dead trees per acre.
- Mortality in those areas is reducing tree density and changing species composition – to primarily Cedar and Black Oak
- Current situation in Plumas County is not outbreak; it's a matter of restoring forest health.
- Actions include thinning of white fir for more resilient stands (un-thinned stands are losing many trees to mortality, which eventually turn into ground fuel)
- Media has not put focus on stand density, which is the factor we have greatest control over

Discussion:

Is the Forest Service going to be more active about stand density? The goal is to deal with the issue, but there are a lot of hurdles. The pace definitely needs to be increased. Ryan Tompkins added that a Categorical Exemption, for up to 3,000 acres, has been granted for preemptive type

work. Each district is planning to use the CE, but they need to have a collaborative group involved. This should help with streamlining projects.

Once a tree is dead, is the beetle gone? An attacked tree can stay green for a long time. By the time a tree starts turning orange the beetle is gone.

How big was the logging work in the photos? (Sara Taddo Jones) 200 acres, commercial and biomass.

What is the timeline when action needs to be taken to stay ahead of mortality? Can beetles still be in the bark after the tree comes down? (Claude Sanders) Inspect trees. Pitch tubes are the trees' defense. If they are too weak for defenses, maybe only dust (frass) will come out. It is ideal to remove infested trees from the site. Otherwise, it can be cut into firewood and covered with clear plastic in a sunny place to kill the beetles. If the bark is filled with holes, the beetles have left. If not, the larvae are still present. There are more resources available online.

Depending on the type of beetle, such as red turpentine, the tree may survive. However, it's a sign that the tree has been identified as weak.

What should be done for existing trees? Inspect surrounding trees, there will not always be an issue.

Have flights been conducted for 2016? (Sue McCourt) Yes, but it will 2-3 weeks for an updated number.

What is the beetles' capability to overwhelm a landscape? In the Southern Sierra, treated areas were too small and isolated and have been overwhelmed by the beetle population. However, treatment has worked on a larger landscape scale in the Black Hills.

Are the beetles subject to natural population crashes? (Claude Sanders) Once in outbreak, predators don't have any influence. Beetle populations will crash once trees are healthier. A cold winter is not something we can rely on in this climate for control.

Has research been done on treatment areas? Yes, but not on the landscape scale. Larger GIS studies would be useful to aggregate information.

What is the relationship of tree mortality to fire risk? Once the needles have fallen off a tree the risk of a crown fire is greatly reduced. Studies have not looked at risk once the woody fuel is on the ground. However, California is different to the areas that have been studied.

Don Gordon, Chief CAL FIRE Lassen, Modoc, Plumas presented "State-wide Crisis and Actions by the California Tree Mortality Task Force."

- There is a statewide emergency response addressing public safety in urbanized forested areas. Particularly around how to get people out of these areas in the case of a fire, how to defend structures, and how to guarantee egress and ingress on roads. Falling trees pose risk to homes, lives, and power lines. The risk is greater than in the past because of the increased development in forested areas.
- With tree mortality is progressing rapidly, the complexity of the issue is what action we take.
- Trees succumbing to drought is a greater issue, not just the beetle killed trees
- The cost to address the 5.5 million trees recommended to be removed is overwhelming local agencies' and utilities' budgets.
- A Governor's declaration has been established to address these issues.
- In November 2015, the California Tree Mortality Task Force held its first meeting.
- The work of the task force is to:
 - Implement the Governor's Proclamation
 - Provide coordination among agencies/entities
 - Establish and focus efforts on High Hazard Zones (HHZs)
 - Identify funding sources

- Reduce regulatory impediments
- Provide public education.
- Expand the use of bioenergy
- Identify potential storage/utilization sites
- Distribute equipment across counties
- Work to identify and promote wood markets
- Core to this effort is local organizations
- If we create a local task force, we have a voice at the state level.
- Grant funds exist specifically for removing larger trees with unique complexities.
- Utilization is critical and the biomass industry needs to be supported. Action includes market exploration.
- Equipment purchased by the State may not make it to Plumas County. It would be beneficial to secure funds to purchase our own.
- The State is looking at streamlining regulatory impediments, primarily to address taking down trees. Commercial outcomes are not the goal.
- Would like to see a formalized task force to take direction for Plumas County. Better to respond now than wait until there's a crisis level.

Discussion:

MaryBeth Farley- Union Pacific RR's budget is overwhelmed by work that needs addressing in their right of way. Currently only working on 25 feet of a 200 foot right of way. In Placer County, the RR is working with the Fire Safe Council to fund fuels reduction work.

Tom March - Cal Trans is also addressing 25 feet in easements.

Ryan McKillop – Soper Wheeler had 2 million board feet of salvage last year. This year they are experiencing less mortality.

A representative from Collins Pine said their fuel hazard reduction treatments were sent to biomass, which is no longer an option. A Board of Supervisors letter is needed in support of biomass.

Lori Simpson acknowledged the need.

Mike Callaghan shared the Placer County model for a task force with seven working areas. He would like to identify agencies/individuals who would like to be involved locally.

Don Gordon suggested we work collaboratively with Lassen County for a unified voice for the region. Next steps are to create an organized working group and create an Incident Action Plan (IAP). The grant window is now open and we need to act quickly.

<p>Meeting Jointly Sponsored by: Plumas County Office of Emergency Services & The Plumas County Fire Safe Council</p>
