

Plumas County Fire Safe Council



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 14th 2021 - 9:00 am.

Combination of in-person and zoom meeting

Mission Statement: "To reduce the loss of natural and human made resources caused by wildfire through Firewise Community programs and pre-fire activities."

Board of Directors

<input type="checkbox"/> Chair , John Reynolds Firewise Community (21)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vice Chair , Kathy Kogge Firewise Community (21)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Secretary/Treasurer Dan Martynn, Retired (22)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lindsay Wood Plumas Audubon Society(22)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Don Gasser RPF (22)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trina Cunningham Maidu Summit Consort. (22)	<input type="checkbox"/> Mike Callaghan Firewise Community (22)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chuck Bowman Firewise Community (21)
<input type="checkbox"/> Jim Hamblin Citizen (21)	<input type="checkbox"/> Ryan Bauer USFS PNF (22)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brad Graevs Feather River RCD (21)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Richard Stockton State Farm (21)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ryan Tompkins UCCE (21)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tracey Ferguson Plumas County Planning (21)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ron Heinbockel Plumas Fire Chiefs (21)	

1. Welcome & Introductions – Kathy Kogge
2. Review Agenda – No changes
3. Approve September Meeting Minutes – m- Gasser, s-Tompkins. Approved.
4. Presentation of Certificates of Recognition to: Sherilyn Schwartz
Sherilyn Schwartz thanked the PCFSC for the work that went into Indian Falls.
5. Public Comment - None
6. Board Comment - Kathy Kogge announced that the PCFSC was presented with the Sacramento Valley Section Local Vision Award from the American Planning Association. The nomination was submitted by Tracey

Ferguson and it was accepted at the award ceremony by Hannah Hepner. Tracey Ferguson is the Sacramento Valley Section Director of the American Planning Association. She said that the APA celebrates organizations

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that have made a difference to local communities. Out of the 21 counties in Northern California, Plumas County has been recognized. An article about the award was written by Ms. Kogge and published in Plumas News.

New Business

1. Donut Defense – Don Gasser

Using a doughnut as an example, introduced the discussion of defensible space beyond the 100' we normally associate with our work of thinning, pruning, and other fuel reduction. The 'doughnut hole' is what each of us works to protect, but the doughnut surrounding the hole should also get our attention, since wildfires often become difficult to control well outside the current defensible space boundaries.

Enlarging the view of your home perimeter from 100' to a 600' distance* increases your perspective to more realistically evaluate the threat that your home is facing. Looking at the doughnut requires an analysis of the vegetation – density, flammability, topography - that potentially threatens. Certainly, looking beyond a current one acre of perimeter to an area greater than thirty acres takes one well out beyond the neighborhood - often into large ownerships and absentee landowners.

This focus on mapping fuel types and ownership in the surrounding doughnut will help to develop a greater understanding of fire safety, by identifying hazards and hazardous conditions. Beyond each defensible space perimeter includes neighbors. In fact, many of us share a donut hole with others, since 100' from our house often includes other homes. Happily, many goals of ownership are shared, and keeping fire out is a priority for all. A look at the larger doughnut may lead to joint efforts to reduce the threat of wildfire.

This investigation of possibilities can lead to greater neighborhood discussion and cooperation, such as we strive for in Fire Wise Communities. Shared problems are often easier to solve, and Fire Safe Council projects have greater impact (and greater chance of funding) when multiple owners are involved.

*arbitrary distance that was confirmed by one fire at one time in one place. Local fuels, topography, and winds dictate actual fire activity.

John Pickett agreed that anywhere from 600-1000ft is adequate to protect homes. He said the original defensible space zone definition needs to be reexamined.

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Bill Jacks suggested that spaces surrounding homes/structures should receive different fuels treatments the further one gets from the home. Fuels reduction treatments should be focused close to the home and work across ownership boundaries to accomplish adequate defensible space. There is also a need for a fire line surrounding homes.

Ron Heinbockle commented that Plumas County has trouble with state enforcement on private land related to fuels reduction. CAL FIRE should cite property owners for not clearing properties.

Don Gasser added that CAL FIRE does not have a presence in Plumas County and a station should be present.

Ryan Tompkins encouraged the group to think of tangible policy recommendations. For example, asking CAL FIRE to change the defensible space guideline to meet the forest and fire conditions. Policy recommendations can also be used to build capacity in PCFSC programs. Mr. Tompkins said that if we identified the policy barriers that keep us from being successful, we could suggest the necessary changes to fit our needs.

Dan Martynn asked if the local fire departments are in a position to assist CAL FIRE with defensible space inspections.

Chief Heinbockle responded that his department doesn't have that capacity. It would be a benefit to work with CAL FIRE and Firewise to establish a defensible space inspection team.

Gia Martynn added that Plumas County may have the authority to cite landowners for inadequate defensible space.

Mr. Tompkins commented that citing property owners may not be the answer to this problem, but it is a good example of a tangible policy shift.

Sue McCourt stated that Plumas County needs a free program with consistent funding for green waste disposal.

Kevin Danaher added that there is a need for funding to employ crews to dispose of green waste.

Hannah Hepner addressed several comments sharing that NRCS is a good resource of property owners looking to complete fuels work on private land. There is a PCFSC hosted meeting next Monday to discuss redefinition of the WUI boundary. The "donut defense" discussion is helpful for the WUI discussion as well as keeping in mind the evacuation route. She reminded the group that a biomass committee has been formed.

Old Business

1. PNF wood permit authority update – Ryan Tompkins said that he co-authored a letter to Plumas and Lassen National Forest Supervisors to consider expanding firewood permits. The letter requests that the USFS allow private landowners to harvest wood on public land if the land abuts private property.
2. Green Waste Committee – Hannah Hepner reported that the committee has met once. They are in the process of creating a list of stakeholders. The next meeting will be scheduled for this month.

Mr. Pickett shared that Sierra Valley Enterprises has just built a saw mill in Loyalton and will be producing wood products. At the moment they have larger dead logs to process and are accepting biomass. They have plans to begin operating the biomass facility one year from now.

Updates

1. Standing Reports and Discussion

- CAL FIRE: Joel Goldman said that CAL FIRE is seeking defensible space inspectors. He encouraged applicants.
- Feather River Resource Conservation District (RCD): Michael Hall said that the La Porte Rd. hand thinning is in progress. Mohawk fuels reduction will begin in the spring. They are starting conversations with Plumas County and Cal OES on a reforestation project throughout the Dixie Fire. Most of the barriers to expanding the “defensible space donut” are tied up in NEPA, but funding may be available to address that barrier. They are talking with state agencies, SNC, and Department of Conservation on strategic opportunities.

John Sheehan asked if the Johnsville ski hill could receive treatment this year.

Mr. Hall responded that CEQA has been completed, but funding is required to complete the work.

Mr. Jacks asked why CEQA and NEPA are required for prescribed fire as a management tool when it is a necessary ecological function.

Trina Cunningham added that the Maidu Summit Consortium is looking to identify the barriers to using prescribed fire on the landscape as a management tool.

Brad Graevs announced that Michael Hall will be acting as the interim FRRCD District Manager.

- Feather River Stewardship Coalition: No update
- Firewise Communities: Beth Rouse said the California FSC tool trailer will be delivered on December 1st. Next Firewise Leads meeting is Wednesday, October 20 at 6pm.

Joe Smalles added that the Fire Line Cooperators follow-up meeting was well attended and progress is being made. Suppression repair in the Dixie Fire boundary is taking priority and it will be difficult to see immediate results. Firewise Leads are encouraged to contact USFS personnel about fire protections in their communities.

- Industry – Timber: Camille Swezy reported that J&C Enterprises will begin Dixie Fire hazard tree/debris removal. J&C has acquired a saw mill in partnership with the Sierra Institute. It will process 15,000 board feet of rough-cut lumber per day, starting as soon as next month. It will be located in Crescent Mills. They will also accept biomass and are looking for contacts at CalTrans or PG&E who are chipping hazardous roadside material. [Tracey Ferguson said Dan Blair is a good PG&E contact for biomass.]

Penny Leinwander asked if J&C has adequate workforce.

Ms. Swezy responded that J&C lost some crew members due to the Dixie Fire. They are restructuring their work and pulling away from traditional logging projects. They will need to hire more crew members once the saw mill is up and running.

Mr. Pickett commented that CAL FIRE and USFS do not often fund wood utilization projects like biomass facilities and saw mills. Projects like these cannot take shape unless the material can be removed from the forest.

Ms. McCourt asked where the roadside materials are going. There was no response.

Mr. Smailes commented that if the models are correct, the next fire will be worse. A timber market is needed to address the issue.

- Industry – Insurance: Richard Stockton said that thinning projects, fuels reduction, and logging all effect the insurance industry. If operations cannot continue, insurance will be more difficult to secure.
- Industry – Utilities: Not present
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS): Ben McNally said the EQIP program is helpful to property owners/ranchers with forested land. This program does not have a minimum or maximum acreage limitation. There is some red tape when it comes to applying for the program; property owners need to register their property as an ag producer in order to receive assistance.
- Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District: Julie Ruiz said that the November 15th deadline to burn in American and Thompson Valleys is approaching. She reminded the group that PUC underburns require a permit.

Ms. McCourt asked if there are funding opportunities through NSAQMD.

Julie Ruiz said that funding is currently only available for Portola.

- Plumas Audubon Society: Not present

- Plumas County Fire Chiefs Association: Chief Heinbockel said that each Fire District in Plumas County has been involved in recent fires. The local fire districts need money from CAL FIRE. Local fire departments are seeing an increase in personnel. Chief Heinbockel thanked the Forest Service for their support on the Dixie Fire.

Mr. Jacks asked if CAL FIRE funds the USFS for response on SRA land and, if they do, if that money be redirected to local fire departments. He asserted that USFS does not respond to fires on private land unless there is a threat to public land. [11.11.21 Correction: Plumas National Forest responds to wildland fire on private land through the CFMA agreement, which is a land swap agreement between the Forest Service and CAL FIRE. PNF responds to wildfire on private land regardless of the potential impact to public lands.]

Mr. Gasser commented that this is a tax and policy issue. Plumas County residents pay taxes to have SRA land protected. He encouraged the group to address supervisors and legislators.

- Plumas County Office of Emergency Services (OES): Not present. Tracey Ferguson said that Pamella Courtwright is the new county employee at OES.
- Plumas County Planning Department: Tracey Ferguson announced that Plumas County has set up regular meetings for fire recovery and debris removal. Cal OES has contracted debris removal teams. Plumas County planning has loosened zoning restrictions to accommodate crews. Any hazard tree within Plumas County/CalTrans 100ft Right of Way is being removed. There is FEMA direct housing assistance for Dixie Fire Victims. Private property owners can apply for Cal OES assistance. Large trees that are not “hazard trees” may be able to be cleared through FEMA assistance. Plumas County’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) is single jurisdiction, but could be expanded. The County is looking for partnerships to address the issues. Plumas County’s LHMP does have fire safe goals; it could act as a bridge between CAL FIRE and Plumas County to support legislation.
- Plumas Underburn Cooperative: Greg Kinne said there are processes and permits needed to work with PUC and that PUC places an emphasis on safety.
- Sierra Nevada Conservancy: Not present
- Tree Mortality Update: None
- Tribal Representatives: Trina Cunningham expressed gratitude that there were no lives lost in this fire. The Dixie Fire burned across about 75% of Maidu Homelands. It has been devastating to both human and nonhuman communities. She said that devastation will continue to occur if we do not act as stewards to our landscapes – thinning and cultural burning are important aspects. MSC is closing escrow on the last PG&E property this November. MSC is looking for partnerships with local logging companies (Collins Pine) to rebuild communities with timber harvested from tribal homelands. They are also looking at more agreements with

CAL FIRE and the National Parks Service to manage land and bring in more funding. Dozer lines greatly impacted and destroyed many sacred sites. But MSC supports the fire line retention efforts, which are important for cultural burning. Tásmam Koyóm meadow restoration plan uses Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to create a “wetter” meadow. They are looking to apply fire in the future to create an even greater fire buffer around this area.

- UC Cooperative Extension: Ryan Tompkins said that FEMA, NRCS, and the Feather River RCD have been in communication with CAL FIRE to bring funds to the “Back 40” reforestation program to benefit affected private landowners. \$762,000 in investments has been reported by 20 Firewise Communities in Plumas and Sierra Counties. Sierra County has 5 new Firewise Communities. November 15th is the deadline to submit Firewise hours to the NFPA. UCCE has published a letter on increasing funding for organizations like PCFSC to build capacity. There is an event in Taylorsville (Oct 19th) for ranchers looking to reduce fuels on grazing lands.
- USFS Hazardous Fuels Reduction: Dan Patterson from the Mt. Hough Ranger District said they are still in fire season and most crews are working the fire. Chipping at Bucks Lake and mastication projects in East Quincy are underway. USFS has contracted crews to help with burning in winter. The Chief of the Forest Service has been talking with US Congress to fund hazardous fuel reduction in the West.

Mr. Jacks asked if Plumas National Forest will allow contract Burn Bosses to help with prescribed fire.

Mr. Patterson responded, no, not currently.

2. Status of Current Grants

- Senior Disabled Defensible Space – Mike McCourt reported that 160 properties were completed this year. It was a successful but challenging year. High demand for crews, a shortage of green waste disposal options, road closures, and evacuations all posed challenges.

Ms. Leinwander asked how the program performed in terms of funding.

Mr. McCourt responded that the program overspent this year but that funding still exists for next year.

- Chipping Program – Ms. Hepner reported that chipping has wrapped up for the season. There are currently no funds for the program next year. This was the first year using the new software, which has analytic features that will be useful for Firewise reporting.
- HFR Project Schedule – Ms. Hepner said that the La Porte Rd hand thin units were contracted to the RCD. Little Grass Valley units are complete, final report to come. Greenhorn archeology report has been submitted to the District Archaeologist. The 151 acre Quincy Wildfire Protection project has begun.

1. Status of Grant Budgets – No update

2. Status of Potential Projects & Grant Opportunities – Ms. Hepner expects to hear soon about the Stevens proposals. The California Fire Safe Council County Coordinators grant has been submitted and should hear back by November 1st. The RAC deadline has been extended to February 15th due to fire season. Expect see announcements from CAL FIRE and SNC.

3. Other Updates & Upcoming Events

Wildfire Preparedness Tour Saturday, October 30th 10am-3pm

Adjourn - Next meeting November 11th, 2021