

Plumas County Tree Mortality Task Force

December 8th – 1:00pm to 2:30pm

555 Main St., Quincy CA 95971

Introduction – Mike Callaghan, Plumas County Fire Safe Council

IAP Working Group Updates

Public Outreach and Information – Sue McCourt – The initial step of establishing a TMTF page on the County website is in progress. Mike Yost has reviewed informational materials has identified two for distribution: California Forest Stewardship Program's Forestland Steward Summer 2016 issue and the USDA's Bark Beetles in California Conifers publication. The group is working on a distribution plan. Key information from other working groups should be directed to Public Outreach.

Mike Callaghan asked if the group was considering news outlets and voiced that timing is critical around some pieces of information – such as the tree mortality web app.

Resource Allocation and Funding – John Sheehan – There are currently two critical components the group is considering:

- 1) The need for a view of the current status of things - who's doing what and where – including a list of what all of the Districts are doing.
- 2) A list of funding sources. Lynn Campbell from SNC has taken the lead and her agency is working on the compilation.

Additionally, the group is monitoring how AB 2480 is affecting agencies' processes. The group would like to see the focus on public infrastructure in the WUI expand to include the forests themselves.

Mapping and Data Collection – Mike De Lasaux – Tree mortality mapping app had been developed by UC Cooperative Extension and will be presentation later in the meeting.

Materials Disposal, Storage, and Utilization – Don Gasser – Collection site requirements are well defined. Current and former mill sites show the most potential for this need. It is paramount that they are a short-term solution for material that has an ultimate end use, primarily biomass. Insurance for the collection sites will be on the scale of \$3000/location. The recently funded county-wide chipping program can support progress towards utilization. The working group is seeking additional innovative uses.

Permits and Regulations – Al Klem – An updated tree removal information sheet was sent out last month. It outlines permitting requirements and lists local RPFs and LTOs. Mr. Klem is available for consultation to the general public to advise them of the best approach for their situation.

Mike Callaghan asked if Plumas County reaches a crisis level of tree mortality, are regulations likely to change. Have regulations been affected by the situation in Southern/Central counties?

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Mr. Klem said that Cal Fire foresters network across the state and information is readily available. However, the situation in Plumas County is currently very different from other parts of the state.

Sue McCourt reiterated that Mr. Klem is an appropriate point of contact for public with questions. He said that often the LTOs are advising, as well. For landowners requiring assistance, points of contact include Dan Martynn at NRCS and the Plumas County Fire Safe Council. Mike De Lasaux mentioned the value of the Society of American Foresters Stewardship Hotline – they have fielded 400 calls in the past several months.

General Updates

John Kolb reported that the air quality grant application to the EPA for a chipper and other green waste equipment was not successful – despite the fact that Portola is identified as one of the six worst air basins in the country. Julie Ruiz added that the same grant was awarded to them last year for the wood stove upgrade program.

Peter Crase noted that Cal Fire has purchased equipment to deal with tree mortality and that it will be available for loan in the future. Mr. Kolb followed that Plumas County will be a low priority for the equipment and that we have local needs beyond the tree mortality issue.

Mr. Callaghan shared that he and Hannah Hepner attended the Board of Supervisors meeting earlier in the week to provide a brief update. Hannah shared feedback from the BOS: Supervisor Simpson had provided brief comments from her meeting with the Region 5 Forester and expressed support for a proactive approach to addressing mortality in Plumas County. A member of the public questioned how many trees exist in the state - as a reference for the 102 million trees that are reported dead. This comment spurred discussion by the TMTF and concluded with the figure that there are 5 billion mixed conifer trees in California. The final item of feedback from the Board of Supervisors was a question from Mike Sanchez about how the issue will affect homeowners insurance.

Presentation by Peter Crase, Cal OES Recovery Program Manager

Mr. Crase has been in Disaster Assistance Recovery for 25 years and is located at the former Mather AFB.

All 58 counties of California have been declared State of Emergency by Governor Brown. Cal Fire was appointed as the lead agency. Cal OES is involved in the monthly California TMTF meetings, as well as the 10 counties that have been designated as high impact. However, the impact is not limited to those 10 counties and the issue is spreading north.

The California Disaster Assistance Act (CDAA) is the State framework used to help communities recover from a disaster. When partnered with federal government, FEMA is involved. In either situation, Mr. Crase is the contact.

In State Fiscal Year 2016/2017 there is \$30 million in the Governor's budget for the disaster relief program. To date \$132 million in tree mortality projects has been estimated for potential applicants for CDAA. However, not much has been reimbursed because the event is evolving slowly and the incident period is still open. If the Governor closes the incident period, there may not be funds available for tree mortality, despite the fact that money is always in the budget for disasters. Eligible damage occurs during the incident period, so when the incident period closes, damage for CDAA reimbursement no longer eligible.

The program includes a cost share of 25% from the cooperating entity. If federal, the cost share is reduced to 6.25%. There is potential to reduce the cost share with donated resources, such as work release programs by county inmates or community volunteers performing eligible work.

Cal OES is able to work with school districts and cemetery districts to take out small numbers of trees. Special Districts may apply directly to CDAA for assistance.

Eligible costs are marking and removal of trees that will *impact county infrastructure*. A dead or dying tree, if it fell and damaged county owned and maintained property such as county roads, buildings, parks, or other infrastructure are eligible for reimbursement.

If the County were to pursue CDAA assistance, the first step is to count trees and establish an estimate of the cost for removal. The total tree removal costs are used for a comparison to the county budget to determine if it's within the county's budget to remove their trees or if state financial assistance is required. If state financial assistance is required, a financial needs statement is created for approval by Cal OES. The statement is submitted with a tree removal plan which also must be approved by Cal OES. A CDAA application, signed by an Authorized Agent appointed by the Board of Supervisors, is also submitted. After CDAA approval, the trees must be marked by an RPF or certified arborist, then the county contracts for tree removal. Bid documents, invoices, proofs of payment, representative photos, map or diagram showing location of trees in relation to threatened infrastructure, GPS readings of all removed trees and permitting docs are presented to Cal OES for reimbursement. After review and approval of all documents (in the form of a CDAA Damage Survey Report), payment from the State Controller's Office for 75% of the eligible costs takes about 6-8 weeks to arrive back at the county.

Q & A:

- If the federal government gets involved after funds are expended, are the expended funds eligible for additional reimbursement?
Potentially – if federal procurement rules and NEPA are followed from the onset, it will be more likely.

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- Is \$1000/tree a mandated cost?
No, you choose whatever cost makes sense locally.
- Is reimbursement for the removal of trees only?
Removal and disposal are reimbursable. Tree count estimates are not a reimbursable expense. However there is a 10% administrative allowance provided by CDAA, which goes to defray administrative costs of requesting, obtaining, administering and auditing the grant. It is valuable to collaborate with other entities, such as PG&E and Cal Trans for removal of “dual purpose” trees – ones that threaten both county and private infrastructure. Cal Trans/PG&E may remove a tree at their expense that is also a tree eligible for CDAA - saving the county the expense. Cal Trans has spent to date about \$70 million on tree removal, with much more to come. Private property trees are eligible if they are threatening county infrastructure. A signed Right of Entry/Hold Harmless Agreement from the private property owner must be obtained first. Mike De Lasaux noted that this relationship is being tested in Tuolumne, where they are ahead on the issue. Mr. Crase said that private property owners who don't want to sign the right of entry/hold harmless agreement are passed up and miss out on the service.
- Are there thresholds that are going to need to be met?
There are no thresholds, however the financial needs statement, tree removal plan and CDAA application must be pre-approved by Cal OES. Additionally, regular maintenance is not funded. It is vital to determine the number of trees. Volunteer tree counts along roads are a way to commence.
Mortality varies across the county. Danielle Bradfield shared that Graeagle and eastern areas are more affected. The tree mortality is in high density, residential areas – which will be more costly to remove.
- Mr. Crase asked if there are any special districts involved in the Plumas TMTF, such as water, school, fire or cemetery districts.
They are not formally represented.
Mrs. McCourt asked if special districts can apply without a County declaration of emergency. Mr. Crase said yes. There is a fact sheet that we can share with those entities. Additionally, incorporated cities can apply. All Special Districts are separate applicants for CDAA, and must apply and be approved separately from the county.
- Can additional funds be requested as trees continue to die?
Yes, additional funds can be requested as more mortality is documented as long as the incident period remains open.
- Is a rural electric cooperative able to participate?
There are other organizations outside the county government that can apply for CDAA assistance. CDAA defines an eligible applicant as a city, city and county, county, county office of education, community college district, school district or special district. Private Nonprofit Organizations may be eligible for tree mortality, further research is required. Mrs. Bradfield noted that utility companies are required to maintain their lines regardless of the disaster designation.

Tree Mortality Web App Presentation

The tree mortality tracking app has been developed by UC Cooperative Extension and is available for preliminary use by the TMTF through: <http://ucanr.edu/plumassieratree mortality> or directly at:

<http://ucanr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/GeoForm/index.html?appid=7235016afd3147e9af74c0503a847ad3>

However, it is not yet ready for public utilization.

When operational it will be used to inform the Board of Supervisors and other entities about the nature of the issue in Plumas County.

Feedback from the Task Force:

Will we be able to relate the identified mortality to infrastructure?

Yes, a GIS layer can be overlaid.

How are remote trees captured?

By enlarging the map and dropping the pin on a point.

How do we account for duplicate reports?

They are avoidable because users can see the points that have already been plotted. If any are identified, they can be manually removed.

Cal Fire's Cal Mapper is a resource for mapping needs, but permission is required for its use.

Scott Rosikewicz said that locally it is used by Cal Fire to track grant projects. Al Klem noted that when someone gets a Cal Fire exemption for tree removal, they are not required to provide its exact location.

Breakout group session –

Mapping and Data Collection task assignments: Mike De Lasaux will look into possible glitches and suggested improvements for the app. John Kolb will check with Plumas Public Works to determine if County Road Supervisors would be allowed to use the mapping app. Mike Callaghan will develop a first draft for outreach pieces for local newspaper, radio, HOA's, CSD, and Fire Districts introducing the app and its benefits. This will be for distribution to the TMTF for comment and release at the appropriate time.

Working groups self adjourned.

Next meeting – January 12th, 2017 1:00pm

**Meeting jointly sponsored by:
Plumas County Office of Emergency Services &**



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