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# REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS OF REGIONAL PRIORITY PLANNING PROCESSES IN CALIFORNIA

PRODUCED BY

**THE WATERSHED RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER**

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The Watershed Research and Training Center is a community-based non-profit organization located in the heart of the South Fork Trinity River Watershed. To learn more about our work, please visit:

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California  
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*Cover photo courtesy of Ed Keith, Deschutes County.*

# List of Acronyms

Table 1. List of acronyms and the full name of each acronym used throughout this paper.

Acronym	Full Name
CNRA	California Natural Resources Agency
CSCC	California State Coastal Conservancy
CWPP	Community Wildfire Protection Plan
FMTF	Forest Management Task Force
GGNPC	Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
IERCD	Inland Empire Resource Conservation District
MRCA	Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority
NCRP	North Coast Resource Partnership
RCDGSD	Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County
RFFC	Regional Forest and Fire Capacity
SMMC	Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy
SMRCD	San Mateo Resource Conservation District
SNC	Sierra Nevada Conservancy
WRTC	The Watershed Research and Training Center

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## Purpose and Background

California faces a plethora of wildfire and forest health challenges, motivating numerous approaches and innovations to regional forest and fire planning processes. In the context of land-use and natural resource planning, the term “regional” often alludes to multi-watershed, multi-jurisdictional scales. There are two primary concurrent multi-stakeholder regional forest and fire planning efforts occurring in California: those led by the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) grantees and those being explored by the Forest Management Task Force Regional Prioritization Groups. The primary purpose of each is to identify and prioritize projects aimed at reducing hazardous fuels to enhance landscape and community resilience to wildland fire.

This white paper summarizes the different approaches to these priority planning, both within the RFFC Block Grantee program and the Forest Management Task Force (FMTF) Regional Prioritization Groups. These plans are all still in development, and the processes are ongoing.

The goal of this white paper is to summarize the Regional Priority Plans’ similarities, differences, planning processes, outputs, obstacles, opportunities, and early lessons learned to help inform future state planning approaches, and to help with information sharing among those engaged in regional planning efforts.

## Legislation, Programs and Initiatives

In 2018, the California Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Agencies released the state’s Forest Carbon Plan (the Plan)<sup>1</sup> which provided the latest science on California’s forests and recommendations to improve statewide forest health and fire resilience. As a central recommendation, the Plan called for the regionalization of statewide forestry work to better organize, strengthen, and leverage local partners.

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<sup>1</sup> "California Forest Carbon Plan — Natural Resources Agency." <https://resources.ca.gov/CNRALegacyFiles/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/California-Forest-Carbon-Plan-Final-Draft-for-Public-Release-May-2018.pdf>. Accessed 23 Jun. 2020.

Following, Executive Order B-52-18<sup>2</sup> directed CAL FIRE to implement the Plan and directed the Natural Resources Agency to work with all relevant agencies to double the rate of forest management treatments in the state within a 5-year period to at least 500,000 acres per year. The USFS also committed around the same time to treating an additional total of 500,000 acres per year.<sup>3</sup>

The FMTF was subsequently created by Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. to help organize activities among state, federal, and county partners to help meet these two goals. According to its website, the FMTF was “organized to protect the environmental quality, public health, and economic benefits that healthy forests provide to California. The [FMTF] aims to increase the rate of forest treatments and expand state wood product markets through innovation, assistance, and investment”.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the FMTF is tied to neither state funds nor legislation; nevertheless, it has continued under the leadership of Governor Newsom.

Under the FMTF, Regional Prioritization Groups were established to organize work regionally, each being co-chaired by CAL FIRE and USFS staff. Their primary purpose is to create work plans to meet the aforementioned goals of 500,000 acres treated per year. This structure was intended to allow the Regional Prioritization Groups to serve as convening points for stakeholders to engage with regional CAL FIRE and USFS leads to highlight priorities and inform the work that would feed up through the task force to meet state and federal goals.

The FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups typically host monthly or bi-monthly meetings. While the total number of participants in these workgroups (i.e., those interested and intermittently participating) can exceed 100, participants in the respective workgroup’s planning calls typically range from 20 to 60 individuals. Participants include a diversity of stakeholders and sector leaders including relevant state agency staff, local elected leaders and local government staff, federal agencies, resource conservation districts, non-profits, tribes, special districts, private landowners, fire safe councils, and others. Participation is open to any interested party and is typically characterized by core participants and intermittent participants, based upon parties’ availability and interest to participate in these voluntary efforts.

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<sup>2</sup> "Executive Order — CA.gov." <https://www.ca.gov/archive/gov39/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/5.10.18-Forest-EO.pdf>. Accessed 23 Jun. 2020.

<sup>3</sup> These commitments together treat 1 million acres, and a corresponding shared 20-year plan for forest health and vegetation treatment that established and coordinates priority projects is now formalized in the state of California and the USDA’s Shared Stewardship Agreement, as of August 2020.

<sup>4</sup> "California Forest Management Task Force - Cal Fire." <https://fntf.fire.ca.gov/>. Accessed 9 Jul. 2020.



In tandem with the formation of the Task Force, the 2018-19 budget included funding to establish the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFC) to strengthen a region's (defined loosely) ability to lead its own forest and fire resilience-oriented project prioritization and project implementation. Administered through the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), specifically the Department of Conservation (DOC), CNRA funded the regional (again, relatively speaking) entities that the DOC identified as “having the fiscal and programmatic capacity to lead a priority planning process, develop projects, and implement demonstration projects.” According to CNRA interviews, this structure was intended to build regional leadership by empowering high capacity regional entities, strengthening local networks of forest and fire practitioners, and conducting extensive outreach with local communities, tribes, governments, and organizations.

Ultimately, state agencies envisioned a forest and fire planning and implementation structure that matched strong state, federal, and regional leadership. Further, this structure was intended to result in priorities that reflected the needs of all interested parties, had regional support and cost-sharing mechanisms, and had higher capacity practitioner networks to support the larger system. CNRA staff intended for the Forest Management Task Force and the Regional Prioritization Groups to serve as a “centralized point of connection between all parties.”

As such, the RFFC Program<sup>5</sup> is designed, in part, to support the development and implementation of regional priority plans to improve forest health and fire resilience, consistent with the recommendations of the Forest Carbon Plan and Executive Order B-52-18. The RFFC Program has several other facets, including capacity building, demonstration projects and outreach. The RFFC Guidelines state that “Regional Priority Plans should identify and prioritize projects at the landscape or watershed-level to address forest health and wildfire risks within their region” (p. 8).<sup>6</sup> The RFFC Guidelines outline a list of variables to consider when prioritizing projects, and also states the expected outcomes from these Regional Priority Plans (pp. 8-9).<sup>6</sup> Details regarding the planning process and contents of the Regional Priority Plans were left undefined, presumably for each group to determine what is best for their respective area. The RFFC block grantees were awarded funding in May, 2019, and the grants end in June, 2024.

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<sup>5</sup> "Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program - CA Department ...." <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/grant-programs/Pages/Regional-Forest-and-Fire-Capacity-Program.aspx>. Accessed 9 Jul. 2020.

<sup>6</sup> "Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program Guidelines." <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/grant-programs/Documents/RFFCP%20Final%20Guidelines%2020.20.20019.pdf>. Accessed 23 Jun. 2020.

## Scale

There are four FMTF regions, all of which represent large geographic areas (see Figure 1). Three of the eight<sup>7</sup> RFFC block grantees, North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP), Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), and California State Coastal Conservancy (CSCC), also cover relatively expansive geographic areas. SNC's region (including the Sierra Nevada Range, the Southern Cascades, and the Modoc Plateau) is made up of 22 counties and covers 25 million acres (region shaded green in Figure 2). Another three RFFC block grantees, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC), Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD), and Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County (RCDSDC), cover relatively smaller, more focused, geographic areas (see Figure 2). IERCD, for example, is responsible for the preservation and management of resources across 823,390 acres of public and private land in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties (region shaded yellow in Figure 2).

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<sup>7</sup> There are eight RFFC block grant recipients total, but six work in specific geographic regions. The other two, the Watershed Research and Training Center and the California Fire Safe Council, are not involved in regional prioritization and planning and therefore are not among those interviewed for this project, nor are they shown on Figure 2.

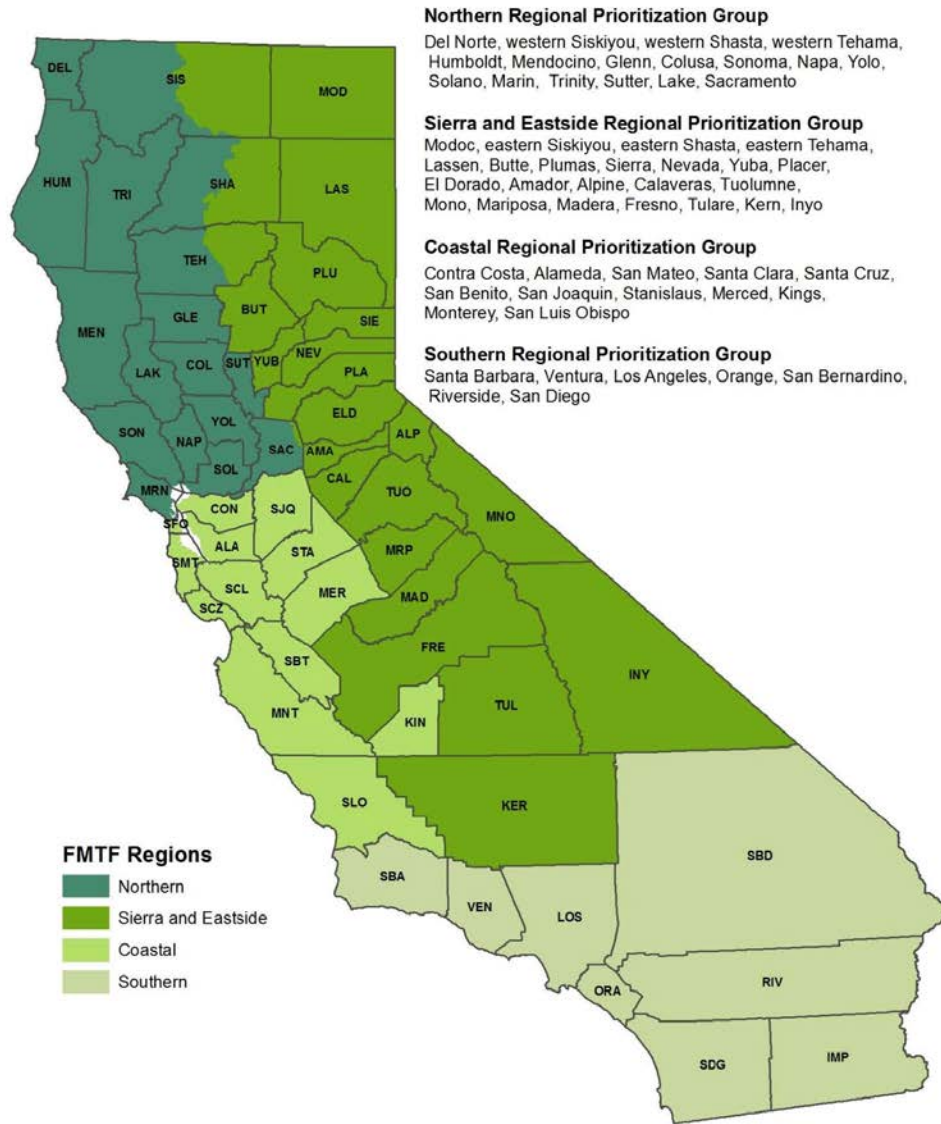


Figure 1. Map depicting the FMTF regions (Forest Management Task Force, July 2018).

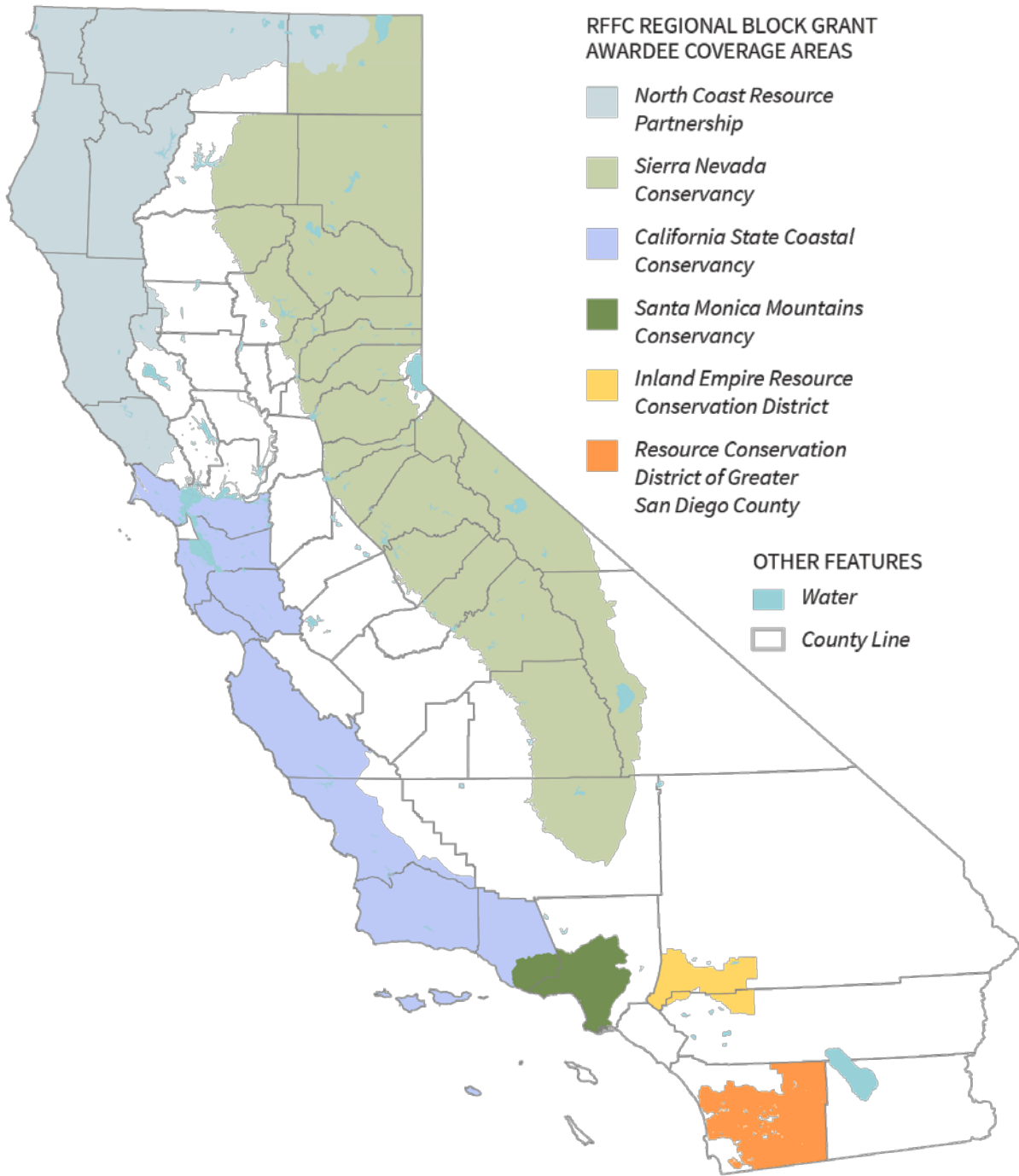


Figure 2. Map depicting the RFFC block grantee coverage areas within California.

## Methods

We conducted interviews with representatives from all four of the FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups (Northern, Sierra and Eastside, Coastal, and Southern), as well as five of the eight RFFC block grantees — excluding CSCC, the Watershed Research and Training Center (WRTC) and the California Fire Safe Council. WRTC also interviewed two CSCC sub-grantees — San Mateo Resource Conservation District (SMRCD) and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC). In total, we interviewed 16 individual key contacts, representing all regions of California and including individuals whose work spans the respective planning efforts. After completing these interviews and the related analysis, WRTC then interviewed the Department of Conservation regarding their recommended next steps given the findings. These recommendations, as well as those concluded by WRTC are addressed at the end of this paper.

## Processes – Leadership, Participation, and Analytical Approaches

As discussed above, each group is working in different geographic areas and at varying scales. Due to the complex differences between the groups, each group is developing its Regional Priority Plan in unique ways, ranging from already-existing collaborative groups leading the effort, to conducting large-scale GIS analyses, to drafting multi-chapter written plans, to spatial priority plans, to hiring private consultants to organize and plan, to collaborating between RFFC block grantees and FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups, to everything in between.

## Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program

Some of the lead organizations and planning groups have a long history of engagement in forestry and fire-related work, and for others, this is their first dive into these issues. The groups who are new to forestry and fire discussed hurdles such as developing partnerships, gaining name recognition, building trust, and learning about the history of planning and implementation work already underway in their regions. But despite the challenges that regional priority planning efforts represent, the groups are generally excited to serve in this role, gain new experience and partnerships, and build capacity within their geographic regions. Most groups are still in the

early stages of regional priority planning. Below is an overview of how the early planning stages were approached by RFFC block grantees and a few of their sub-grantees.

## Early Planning Stages

NCRP developed an outline of proposed steps for developing a Regional Priority Plan, shown in [Appendix A-1, Draft NCRP Regional Priority Plan Process](#), early in the launch of their RFFC grant, utilizing an ad-hoc planning group made of their Policy Committee and NCRP staff. They also developed a priority plan outline, and iteratively had it reviewed by different groups and individuals who were able to evaluate the outline from different perspectives. NCRP is still working on fine-tuning their outline, with a draft expected by Fall, 2020.

SNC first worked on understanding what planning processes were already underway, and focused on building upon the work of existing collaborative groups, as well as encouraging partners who were not already involved to participate. After conducting 90 interviews, SNC facilitated helping these existing groups engage in this new planning process by using RFFC and other funds. SNC tailored support and resources that made sense for each specific group. See [Appendix A-2, Increasing the Capacity of Established Groups throughout the Sierra Nevada Region](#), for specific examples. SNC already had Area Representatives in place throughout their entire service area, who were assigned to three or four counties to attend collaborative meetings, assist with grants, and provide technical expertise. The knowledge from Area Representatives was helpful in understanding which groups were already engaged across the region.

One subgrantee of CSCC, GGNPC, is partnering with an existing collaborative group, OneTam. They are continuing to work on a region-wide ecological health assessment that started in 2016. This ecological health assessment, Peak Health<sup>8</sup>, gave GGNPC a geospatial dataset to work with, and their work focuses on continuing ecological health assessments in ecosystems that were not covered under that report. GGNPC and OneTam are continuing to gather county-wide geospatial data, including LiDAR and aerial imagery, to use as a foundation for their Sub-Regional Priority Plan. GGNPC and OneTam put together a steering committee and a working group consisting of resource managers from their partnering agencies to help develop their Sub-Regional Priority Plan.

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<sup>8</sup> "Peak Health | One Tam." <https://www.onetam.org/peak-health>. Accessed 24 Jun. 2020.

Another sub-grantee of CSCC, SMRCD, expanded their focus to include not only their geographic range in San Mateo County, but the entirety of the local CAL FIRE Unit (Santa Mateo-Santa Cruz, CZU), which also includes Santa Cruz County. This meant partnering with the Santa Cruz Resource Conservation District. SMRCD is also working closely with the FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group to identify and meet mutual goals. SMRCD has been providing technical support to the FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group, and they worked together on developing a survey for project identification throughout the region. They are also working with an already-established collaborative group, the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network,<sup>9</sup> which has a Fire and Forest Health Team. SMRCD is currently working through challenges specific to their region, including being in an area with no federal lands, and a lot of small, private landowners. It is clear that projects will have to include multiple landownerships, so they are brainstorming how to accomplish that.

For another example, IERCD spent the first few months of their RFFC program attending meetings, introducing themselves, and explaining the RFFC program and the funds available for capacity building. They are now integrated into the Inland Empire Fire Safe Alliance,<sup>10</sup> a long-standing collaborative in the region. IERCD is focusing their efforts on increasing the capacity of this pre-existing collaborative. See [Appendix A-3, Working with a Diverse Group of Stakeholders and Partners in a Long-Standing Collaborative Group](#), for a list of the stakeholders representing this group.

Also in Southern California, SMMC and their partner Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) are in the early stages of planning. Efforts to hire a private consultant to assist with landscape analysis and development of the priority plan are underway. There is also a collaborative already in place, Santa Monica Mountains Fire Safe Alliance, whose mission is to “find solutions and resources for property owners and land managers to improve stewardship in the wildland urban interface.”<sup>11</sup>

The RCDGSD hired a forestry specialist to help with the RFFC planning process, and they are working to define projects and territories, determine what partners are missing, identify who is responsible for what areas, and where current gaps are. They hosted a strategic planning meeting with the agencies involved in the regional priority planning process, including 18

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<sup>9</sup> "Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network." <http://scmsn.net/>. Accessed 25 Jun. 2020.

<sup>10</sup> "Home Page www.fireinformation.com." <http://www.fireinformation.com/>. Accessed 24 Jun. 2020.

<sup>11</sup> "A Road Map to Fire Safety - California FAIR Plan." [https://www.cfpnet.com/FORMS/RoadMaptoFireSafetyRev9\\_11.pdf](https://www.cfpnet.com/FORMS/RoadMaptoFireSafetyRev9_11.pdf). Accessed 24 Jun. 2020.

different tribes, the Cleveland National Forest, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, California State Parks, Caltech Palomar Mountain, and San Diego Gas and Electric.

## Identifying Projects

Groups have a variety of methods for identifying projects within their regions, while meeting the goals of the RFFC program.

For example, NCRP intends to identify a comprehensive list of forest health and fuel load reduction projects for the North Coast region using the following methods (see [Appendix A-1, Draft NCRP Regional Priority Plan Process](#)):

- Conduct regional-level screening analysis using remote sensing to determine areas of heavy fuel loading, vulnerable communities, etc. Methods for this analysis will be reviewed by local, state, academic, and federal experts in remote sensing and mapping, as well as by NCRP advisors;
- Identify a comprehensive list of projects via interviews, cross-walking with existing project lists for the region, such as CAL FIRE and Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) project lists, and a formal NCRP request for proposals in late 2020; and
- Issue formal requests for proposals for either conceptual or preliminary projects where no clear funding source has already been identified, and for demonstration projects.

As mentioned in the subsection [Early Planning Stages](#), SNC identified groups throughout their region to invest in so that these groups can develop their own lists of priority projects. RCDGSD is also having the agencies and organizations they are working with develop their own project lists.

The CSCC sub-grantee GGNPC is developing a conceptual framework on how to integrate geospatial data into project identification. Metrics for different forest types, including how to create healthy ecosystems from not only a fuels management perspective, but also an ecosystem resilience viewpoint, is being created.

The CSCC sub-grantee, SMRCD, is working directly with the FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group to identify projects. As mentioned, the Coastal Region Prioritization group, in close collaboration with SMRCD, sent out a project information survey to partners in their 13-



county region to create a list of projects. The survey questions can be found in [Appendix A-4. Coastal Region Prioritization Plan Survey](#).

IERCD aims to compile a comprehensive list of projects for their region, including projects that were considered but have yet to occur, projects that have no funding, and new projects. They are also reviewing CWPPs to see what projects were already included in the landscape-scale plans.

## Project Prioritization

The RFFC Guidelines list considerations for prioritizing projects, and states that projects should be prioritized by type, resource, watershed, implementation strategy, or other logical divisions (p. 8).<sup>6</sup> The RFFC Guidelines listed ten considerations when prioritizing projects during the development of each Regional Priority Plan (p. 8)<sup>6</sup>:

- Areas that contribute to high wildfire risk faced by adjacent or nearby communities;
- Forests projected to be at-risk due to climatically driven stressors;
- Forests at greatest risk to high-severity mortality events (e.g., fire, insect outbreak);
- Forests at high risk of type-conversion (e.g., forest to shrub or grass vegetation);
- Areas with high habitat values at risk, such as spotted owl activity centers;
- Headwater areas that provide significant water supply;
- Areas that need to be reforested after high mortality events;
- Forests that face risk of conversion to other uses, including development and agriculture;
- Opportunities for follow-up “maintenance” treatments via prescribed fire or other fuels reduction techniques; and
- Availability of adequate workforce and infrastructure to complete projects.

As mentioned in the [Purpose and Background](#), details regarding how to accomplish regional priority planning was left undefined, presumably for each group to determine what is best for their respective area. Deciding how to prioritize projects has been a common challenge for the majority of RFFC block grantees, as well as some of the FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups. Specifically:

- Some groups are not wanting to prioritize projects due to the perceived liability when it comes to projects being selected for grant funding.
- There is a shared lack of knowledge in understanding why projects need to be ranked or prioritized, and how that will affect future funding opportunities for the projects.
- Some groups think that if the projects have gone through the selection criteria to meet RFFC program goals and objectives, all of those projects are of utmost importance and no ranking is needed.
- Other groups are asking the sub-grantees or the collaborative groups they are working with to rank the projects as a group effort.

GGNPC hopes to prioritize project areas based on the need for treatment using a geospatial model as well as ground-truthing. NCRP has a long history of investing local, state, and federal funding in a variety of projects that benefit the communities and landscapes of the North Coast region and the rest of California. They are well-versed in ranking and scoring projects, and have several examples of ranking criteria on the NCRP website.<sup>12</sup> For their RFFC project, they will use a hybrid approach of qualitative and quantitative criteria, using the objectives of the grant to numerically score projects, including whether the project serves economically disadvantaged populations.

## Public Engagement and Outreach

While the RFFC guidelines do not specifically mention “public outreach,” the guidelines state that Regional Priority Plans “must be developed with broad participation of *regional residents* [emphasis added], tribes, federal/state/local governments, landowners, and other organizations. Each block grant recipient should engage *priority populations* [emphasis added] and other stakeholders within their jurisdiction in the development of their Regional Priority Plan” (p. 9).<sup>6</sup>

NCRP has a significant set of processes for public outreach. The NCRP website lists all projects, including those related to the RFFC program; the website is far reaching and anyone can sign up to receive email updates.<sup>11</sup> In addition, all NCRP meetings are open to the public. NCRP plans to send the draft priority plan to their email list, and will also send the draft out to

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<sup>12</sup> "North Coast Resource Partnership." <https://northcoastresourcepartnership.org/>. Accessed 25 Jun. 2020.

partners to distribute for feedback. NCRP strives for full transparency with their partners, and eventually with the public, about the planning processes.

SNC's sub-grantees are conducting their own outreach. GGNPC has a website that discusses where they are in the process of the RFFC project, and they plan on hosting one or two public workshops to discuss the project. OneTam is working on a list of audiences to target, including under-served communities who are typically left out of the planning process. Overall, inclusivity is an important goal to OneTam. SMMC is also interested in reaching out and working with disadvantaged communities, and RCDGSD wants a cohesive representation of stakeholders as well. SMRCD has engaged the local fire safe councils, which is a collaborative space that reaches a multitude of audiences.

## End Products

Although there is no direction on what a final product should look like for RFFC Block Grantees, these groups seem to be meeting the desired process direction and working toward the stated outcomes. The RFFC Guidelines list desired outcomes of the priority plans (pp. 8-9).<sup>6</sup> Desired Outcomes include:

- Increased capacity of block grant recipients and their partners to identify, prioritize, and plan for wildfire and forest health needs within their region;
- Coordinated fire planning and management efforts across land ownerships;
- Development and management of a broad collaborative structure and effective networks of partners and stakeholders; and
- Attainment of strong regional support for the Regional Priority Plan and identified projects through broad inclusion of stakeholders and partners.

Some groups have already produced documents such as surveys, project identification spreadsheets, and priority plan outlines. However, most groups are still brainstorming what their Regional Priority Plans will look like. Some groups want to build interactive maps, some are producing a multi-chapter document, some are developing a list of projects, and some are not sure what their end product will look like yet.

NCRP is developing one regional plan with multiple chapters. NCRP demonstration projects are required to contribute to the Regional Priority Plan, and NCRP is expecting demonstration projects to showcase examples for the region. Although their planning area is large, the workload is distributed between NCRP staff, consultants and sub-grantees. NCRP's goal is that

the plan will tell a compelling story, backed by data and local input, about the region's immense need for funding.

SNC hopes to have an interactive map linked to the sub-grantees' priority plans and projects. They are not planning on developing a planning document, but are instead focused on designing and delivering a program that builds capacity within their region.

GGNPC would like to develop a 10-page document with graphics that describes the work in a broad way. GGNPC is also working on conceptual models for different forest types, linking forest attributes to treatment types and landscape objectives, and they want to produce technical memos that dive into the deeper science behind the plan. GGNPC will also have a vegetation and landscape database that identifies specific areas that need treatment.

SMRCD is discussing what the final product looks like, but they are hoping to have a list of projects with maps, and information on which projects are in development, ongoing, or in a maintenance stage.

IERCD wants to create a master database with maps of the projects. They hope to have a priority plan, maps, project types/timelines/rankings, and resources needed. They are brainstorming ideas about an internet planning tool that lists all of the projects, and the projects would be hyperlinked to a project-specific folder with maps and planning documents.

RCDGSD wants to create a document that will outline areas of concern within San Diego County, including who is responsible for what areas, a cohesive list of prioritized projects, and a map of priority project areas.

## Early Lessons Learned

Groups were asked about early lessons learned, related to regional priority planning, and a wealth of insights were shared.

NCRP felt that it was important to take the time to develop a detailed outline for their plan as a first step, and then to get feedback from a multitude of stakeholders before moving forward. Just saying "here is the outline, what do you think?", could not provide the results that NCRP was looking for. Instead, they held meetings with breakout sessions, and pulled apart the outline, section by section. They received detailed feedback from these meetings, and then applied that content into the outline. NCRP also learned that it is important to include language in contracts

that conveys that the various project managers are not working in independent silos, but that they are a part of a bigger, regional-wide effort.

SNC learned that it is necessary to engage indigenous communities early in the planning process. They also had an idea of what the regional priority planning process would look like when they started; including that every sub-region would have some sort of planning process and a plan. But they did not charge into this project telling sub-grantees what the process was going to look like. They reported that with capacity building efforts, the questions are not known until the process starts, and that the process is hands-on. SNC said that active, regular communication with sub-grantees is critical.

GGNPC echoed what many other groups said; having an existing collaborative and partnerships is extremely helpful. If there are regional goals in place, it is even easier. It was also helpful to have foundational spatial data and frameworks in place.

SMRCD is working in parallel with other resource conservation districts in the region. They also found it helpful to work on their priority plan at the CAL FIRE Unit level, which meant directly partnering with another resource conservation district. They found it useful to work closely with the FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group, and they hope to compile the priority plans into one regional document. SMRCD also said that the FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group was open to sharing lessons learned regarding the project information survey, and that information exchange between regions has been helpful.

IERCD learned early in the process to be cognizant of collaborative groups that are already in place. They had a rocky start while learning what was already in development in their region, but they were active listeners and developed a solid working relationship with the regional collaborative group.

RCDGSD also found that their long-standing partnerships in the area made for easier work. They described their approach as flexible and adaptable, and remind themselves that this effort is a work in progress.

## Forest Management Task Force Regional Prioritization Groups

The RFFC Guidelines state that Regional Priority Plans must be developed in coordination with the relevant Regional Prioritization Group of the Governor's FMTF (p. 8).<sup>6</sup> Coordination with the FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups is intended to ensure that priorities within each RFFC

Regional Priority Plan are aligned, where appropriate, with priorities of all state and non-state member agencies of the FMTF and their respective project-funding programs, and to identify additional needs not presently funded (p. 8).<sup>6</sup> The FMTF website states that the “regional focus of these groups will allow them to focus on specific needs, opportunities, or barriers that are unique to each region across all the subject matters. The goal for these four regional prioritization groups is to identify specific regional issues and problems, and to prioritize and propose solutions for consideration by the Task Force”.<sup>13</sup> All FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups are working with RFFC Block Grantees, and some are even working with RFFC sub-grantees.

## Early Planning Stages

The FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group’s initial efforts were to identify existing collaboratives and other land managers who would like to participate in the effort. The group’s initial goals included basic fact finding about the available resources in their area, exploring existing outreach efforts, conducting outreach to parties they were not in contact with, establishing a collaborative process for stakeholders to provide input on, and identifying how the group could prioritize work based on values at risk.

The FMTF Sierra and Eastside Region Prioritization Group’s primary goal is to provide recommendations regarding the highest priority projects that are eligible for state funding. A critical first step in this process was to better understand the scale, distribution, and objectives of planned projects across the region.

The FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group’s initial efforts were aimed at educating existing collaboratives and other land managers on what the FMTF is. The leadership of this group spent a lot of time reaching out to groups and individuals who are already doing fire and fuels work.

The FMTF Southern Region Prioritization Group’s main goal is to act as an informational sharing resource for a multitude of partners, including but not limited to CAL FIRE, the U.S. Forest Service, fire safe councils, local fire departments, resource conservation districts, and

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<sup>13</sup> “Regional Prioritization Groups.” <https://fmtf.fire.ca.gov/regional-prioritization-groups/>. Accessed 26 Jun. 2020.

others. The geographic range is vast, and the partners are diverse, therefore leadership did not find it feasible for the group to be anything other than an information sharing resource.

## Identifying Projects

The FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group developed a spreadsheet of projects within the region's footprint, after hosting a workshop and having several iterations of the list.

The FMTF Sierra and Eastside Region Prioritization Group is scoping to see what self-identified projects already exist. They recently sent a project information spreadsheet out to the participants. Unfortunately, they only received responses from 4 of the 40 groups, for a total of 50 projects identified by the 4 groups that responded. The group aims to have a list of planned projects, with no prioritization, mapped in ArcOnline. Currently, the FMTF Sierra and Eastside Region Prioritization Group is on a different timeframe than the SNC sub-grantees as far as project identification, but the groups plan to integrate together later.

The FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group recently sent a project information survey out to their partners, after receiving advice from the FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group on lessons learned from their own survey efforts. The project list that the FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group creates will be used for collaboration and planning, and may be incorporated into CAL FIRE Unit Fire Plans, CWPP's, as well as the CSCC's RFFC Regional Prioritization Plan.

The FMTF Southern Region Prioritization Group is not working on a project identification list.

## Project Prioritization

The idea of project prioritization was challenging for the FMTF Northern Regional Prioritization Group. There is no funding involved with any of the FMTF prioritization groups, and the groups do not have influence over funding sources. Since priorities can change with funding sources, political climate, or resource needs, and there was concern about rating projects across different counties and landscapes, the group instead generated categories that can fulfill different types of priorities in the future. The group can now sort the projects by needs for current funding sources, acknowledging that the highest priority projects identified for each county or landscape should receive equal consideration by granting agencies.

These categories include:

- Partners;
- Project type;
- Secondary benefits;
- County;
- Vegetation type(s);
- Treatment area;
- Total project cost;
- Implementation status; and
- Community lead or government lead.

In order to not duplicate efforts, the FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group will not be prioritizing projects. NCRP is working on that for most, but not all, of the region (see subsection [Direction and Authority](#)). Instead, the group will focus on collaborating with members to identify and improve their current list of projects, and states that all of the projects are “priorities” for the region. The FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group has been involved with NCRP’s meetings regarding the priority plan outline, and there has been discussion of developing a crosswalk between the FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group and NCRP’s project lists and prioritizations. Collaboration was characterized as strong between these groups, and they are considering transferring leadership of the FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group to NCRP because they have similar interests, a funding source to help move the project list forward, and NCRP is considered to be in-tune with land managers in the region.

The FMTF Sierra and Eastside Region Prioritization Group does not plan on prioritizing their project list. But if it is necessary due to potential California Climate Investment requirements, the group might break the projects into categories and prioritize the projects themselves.

The FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group aims to rank projects by county or by CAL FIRE Unit, rather than at the regional level, or maybe not rank projects at all. If a project does not fit the criteria, maybe they will not add it to the list, or maybe it will be an indicator that the project needs the most help. The group needs to review the project list first, and is hoping that this process will inform how they move forward with or without prioritization.



## Public Engagement and Outreach

The FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group is driven by public engagement. The leadership of this group worked on soliciting interest, and the group's members propose what they want to share. The group attempts to reach out to the County Board of Supervisors, federal, state and local agencies, private landowners, land managers, and other parties like the NCRP, resource conservation districts, fire safe councils, etc. Participation has varied since the group was established.

The FMTF Sierra and Eastside Region Prioritization Group has over 100 participants, representing 40 different groups, working throughout their coverage area of over 25 million acres.

The FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group is working closely with CSCC sub-grantees, especially SMRCD, as discussed in earlier sections. Anyone who is interested in fire and fuels work throughout the region is invited to participate in the group, and membership is based on participation. There are currently 130 individuals on the e-mail list.

The FMTF Southern Region Prioritization group is multidisciplinary. The group consists of federal, state, and local agencies, fire safe councils, resource conservation districts, resource conservation authority, and others. There are over 70 individuals on the e-mail list. All RFFC block grantees are invited to participate in, and give project updates during, the FMTF Southern Region Prioritization Group's regional calls. However, IERCD sees the region as too large to warrant using the group as a platform to talk about San Bernardino Mountain issues, and related Regional Priority Plan development, so cross-pollination and overlap between some of the RFFC block grantees and the FMTF Southern Region Prioritization Group is sparse.

## End Products

The project list created by the Northern Region Prioritization Group was created as a tool to help focus funding efforts, regardless of which agency or department is distributing specific grant dollars.

There have been discussions of SNC possibly recommending projects and priorities to the FMTF Sierra and Eastside Region Prioritization Group process to build one Regional Priority Plan. The two groups work closely to identify where there is potential for overlap, and where there are gaps, as to avoid duplicating efforts.

The FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group does not envision creating a priority plan separate from the RFFC efforts, instead they see the Regional Prioritization Plan being developed and led by CSCC's subgrantees, and turned into one plan in the end.

As mentioned above, the Southern Region Prioritization Group does not find it feasible for the group to be anything other than an information-sharing resource.

## Early Lessons Learned

The FMTF region prioritization groups were asked about early lessons learned, related to regional priority planning, and each group had unique perspectives to share.

The FMTF Northern Region Prioritization Group's leadership felt that more direction and purpose are necessary. There is a risk with the prioritization groups, because people are investing their time and building products (such as the project list), but if there is no purpose or true function for the group, members could become unsupportive.

The FMTF Sierra and Eastside Prioritization Group's leadership believes there is value in groups figuring out what works best for them, but also thinks there should be a stronger foundation to work from that would allow for unique components. The leadership also believes that these types of planning processes take a lot of time, and that many groups and individuals are already overtaxed. People want to participate, engage, and share — but it is a substantial time commitment, and no one understands what the end result is intended to be.

The FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group's leadership spent significant time helping people understand the big picture, answering questions such as: What is the top-down approach that created this process? What is the FMTF? Who is involved, and why was it formed? What are the corresponding Executive Orders and Governor Orders? The leadership believes that they needed a better way of telling this story at the beginning of the process.

The FMTF Southern Region Prioritization Group's leadership believes that in order to be successful in regional priority planning, they would need to be much smaller geographically. They also believe that the CAL FIRE Units are already successful at resource sharing among the units.

# Challenges

## Direction and Authority

The RFFC Guidelines state that “in order to ensure appropriate consistency across regions in the development of each Regional Priority Plan, block grant recipients and partnering entities will work in coordination with the Agency, Department, and the Statewide Support Entity block grant recipient, who will support the implementation of the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program statewide” (p. 9).<sup>6</sup> The guidelines mention “appropriate consistency across regions,” but there is little guidance for the Regional Priority Plans, which makes this task difficult.

Specific concerns include:

- Although groups agreed that flexibility is important, and they wanted the ability to have “regional endeavors led by regional endeavors,” the majority of groups thought that a clearer framework for the priority plans would be helpful, while still allowing for flexibility at the local level.
- One group said, “It would have been nice to have clearer direction that there is no direction.” Another mentioned that having no roadmap is challenging, and they are not sure who is in charge, and what the roles and responsibilities are.
- Groups lack power or control over telling individuals, organizations, and agencies within their planning regions what to do, but voiced concerns about being tasked with that role.
- Most groups, as mentioned in the subsection [Project Prioritization](#), also wanted more guidance on, and reasoning behind, ranking projects.
- Concerns were also voiced that with the lack of direction, some groups might be focused on fuels treatment work, as opposed to a more holistic approach to landscape-level restoration and ecosystem health.

Leaders from the FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups felt that clear direction and purpose are necessary. As the FMTF Working Groups<sup>14</sup> formed with specific goals and deadlines, the Regional Prioritization Groups were initiated without much direction. Given that several of these

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<sup>14</sup> “Forest Management Task Force Working Groups”. <https://fmtf.fire.ca.gov/working-groups/>. Accessed 26 Jun. 2020.

groups are transitioning away from developing prioritized project lists, ideas being explored for the Regional Prioritization Group's future purposes include being used to help address concerns within the other FMTF working groups. The Regional Prioritization Group's reach a broader audience than these other groups, and consequently leaders believe they may help broaden out the participation in discussions around current and emerging regional issues.

## Representation

Another challenge inherent to the structure of the RFFC program itself is that 18 counties are not covered by any of the RFFC regional grantees, and therefore these counties are left out of RFFC regional prioritization planning efforts. This is especially problematic if the FMTF groups do not produce a separate stream of priorities, since those 18 counties could have, in theory, been represented in the FMTF planning efforts. Many of these counties — including but not limited to Colusa, Glenn, Lake, Napa, Solano, Orange, and Yolo Counties — regularly experience wildfires, have at least portions of land that are considered “high risk,” have vegetation management needs and goals, yet lack a state-supported way to discern, document and communicate those priorities.

Several of these 18 counties have local groups interested in either working independently, with other, adjacent, and excluded counties, or working with adjacent RFFC regional block grant recipients to fold their priorities into their “region’s” plan, but again, this would be done without state support and therefore could create a significant burden on these local groups. Further, the block grant recipients are in no way required to expand the geographic scope of their plans, so whether the latter approach will bear fruit is unknown.

This disparity is heightened when considering the financial and institutional capacity inequities within some of those counties (e.g., Lake County). Financial support for the creation of prioritization plans across the entire state seems to be an important missing piece to this planning process.

It is also important that, if created outside of the existing RFFC framework, these counties' or these regions' plans are presented to the same decision-making and funding audiences to ensure that they receive equitable consideration.

## Fire Adaptation is Broader than Vegetation Management

Lastly, the RFFC prioritization plans will largely, if not entirely, be focused on vegetation management, which is to be expected given the RFFC program's connection to Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds. However, stakeholders have noted that the plans omit several other important fire adaptation practices that would contribute to community and landscape resilience to wildfire such as infrastructure upgrades, home hardening, evacuation planning, and reducing unplanned ignitions. These additional strategies are important everywhere, but are the primary risk reduction strategies in much of southern California and other geographies where fuels management is less effective at moderating fire behavior and effects.<sup>15</sup>

## Communication among Planning Initiatives

Although there are examples of strong working relationships between FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups and RFFC block grantees, there is some difficulty with communication, and confusion of roles and responsibilities, among the groups. This seems partly due to the lack of direction, as mentioned in the subsection above, [Direction and Authority](#). The leaders of the FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups are already overtasked, so when asked if the FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups are working together, all leaders said that communication is limited, but everyone wanted more communication among the groups. All FMTF groups stated that it would be nice to know what the other groups are doing, but no one has enough time to take on that additional leadership role. A formal and facilitated approach to regular communication could help refine the Regional Groups' roles in the FMTF and improve efficiency and effectiveness for both leaders and stakeholders engaging in the groups.

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<sup>15</sup>Fire Adapted Communities Graphic and Facilitator's Guide: <https://fireadaptednetwork.org/resource/fire-adapted-communities-graphic-and-facilitators-guide/> Accessed 30 Jul. 2020.

# Opportunities

## Sharing of Knowledge

All groups are working on challenging and unique issues in their own respective, diverse regions. Their strategies are all informed by the unique institutional landscapes and histories of their regions, and are aspiring to add value to collaborations and planning efforts already underway. There is already some information-sharing occurring between the groups, especially among the RFFC Block Grantees, via monthly webinars, an online networking platform, and individual relationships that have grown from those full-group interactions. The WRTC is specifically tasked with this function and provides this coordination and inter-regional exchange within the RFFC program.

To facilitate these types of discussions statewide, regardless of programmatic affiliation (RFFC vs. FMTF vs. neither), WRTC also developed and is hosting the online networking platform called “California Forest and Fire Peer Connect.” This is an online workspace designed for community-based organizations working within California to connect on forestry, fire and fuels issue, and while it’s not a requirement, many of the participants are involved RFFC or FMTF regional planning efforts. Practitioners from a variety of entities have been invited to this space, including tribes, nonprofits, resource conservation districts, fire safe councils, and more. The primary intention with this workspace is to create a virtual platform for peer learning using a non-judgmental, learning-focused mindset. The WRTC promotes a safe and inclusive learning environment.

## Coordinated Actions

Other examples of information-sharing across RFFC grantees include RCDGSD working with IERCD to host a CWPP workshop every year for local fire safe councils and community members. At this workshop, they develop new plans or renew existing plans. RCDGSD also helps groups interested in starting Fire Safe Councils throughout California. The Fire Safe Council of San Diego County, whose mission is to “provide an exchange of information through education and training, and to foster fire prevention and safety throughout the San Diego region,” including 41 local fire safe councils within the county.<sup>16</sup> The Fire Safe Council of San

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<sup>16</sup> "Fire Safe Council of San Diego County." <http://firesafesdcounty.org/>. Accessed 24 Jun. 2020.

Diego County was formed in 1997 through a collaboration between the RCDGSD, along with local, state, federal, and tribal fire agency partners. The RCDGSD manages the programs and the funds for the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County. CSCC sub-grantees are working in close partnership with one another. They expect to be producing different priority plans, but are in communication about processes, thoughts, and ideas. Groups that are adjacent to one another seem to have good relationships and information sharing, however, there is a disconnect at the sub-grantee level.

## New Data Products

Sub-grantees are doing a tremendous amount of work with the Regional Priority Plans, and with forestry, fire, and fuels work in general. Some groups are also working on similar final outputs, such as spatial visualization of projects. Multiple groups have worked on project information surveys, and have lessons learned from that process. Groups can work together to discern how to prioritize or rank projects. Several groups are working to include under-represented community members in the planning process, and are looking for successful ways to enhance those outreach efforts.

# Reflections and Recommendations

## Department of Conservation's Reflections on Moving Forward

Upon completing the initial interviews for this project, the final phase of this work was to review WRTC's findings with the agency administering the RFFC program for the Natural Resources Agency, the Department of Conservation, to see what insights and reflections they wanted to share. Keali'i Bright, the Division Director of the Department's Land Resource Protection Division, leads administration of RFFC. In his previous role at the Natural Resources Agency, he was part of the team that established the Governor's FMTF. His summarized thoughts are as follows:

When California launched the FMTF, its associated Regional Prioritization Groups, and the RFFC Program in 2018, the state intended these efforts to be the first steps of a longer-term effort to partner state and federal agencies leadership with strong regional partnerships. The state's goal was to make the collective state-wide work on forest and fire resilience more

efficient, equitable, and impactful. If the state and federal governments were to scale-up actions to meet their combined goal of treating one million acres per year, regionalization was seen as a helpful step to augment existing project-by-project funding models.

This approach assumed that broader agreement between state, federal and regional stakeholders on regional work plans, combined with increased capacity to lead projects, would open doors for regions to lead multi-year implementation efforts of regional plans. Further, it was assumed that this approach would enable better outreach to Tribal Nations, underserved communities, other stakeholders, and beneficiaries, leading to plans and projects that were more responsive to unique needs of a region.

Together, work being completed at the state, federal, and regional level was intended to leverage each other's strengths and scale-up rather than if it were occurring in silos. In theory, with broad agreement on a regional plan that identified priority risks and regional treatment areas, with strong regional, state, and federal support, a region could make a compelling case for stable, long-term funding from state, federal, and local agencies for project development and implementation. Lastly, stable, long-term funding could allow regions to develop the economic systems of labor, environmental planning, and implementation needed to scale up forest and fire resiliency work to meet state and federal goals.

Looking forward, when the RFFC and FMTF planning efforts, and others, are completed, the Department of Conservation hopes that the collective group of participating partners will be in a strong position to begin "establishing a durable regional governance model for forest and fire resiliency work." Ideally, there will be a wealth of localized planning and project priority information to instruct future investments and implementation, as well as the application of technological and social best practices. Hopefully, regional project leadership and outreach networks will have more capacity and be in more places. Trust will ideally have been strengthened between federal, state, and regional leadership to foster a commitment to shared stewardship that authentically responds to local, regional, state, and federal needs.

Finally, project implementation across the state happening at historic levels, which the DOC hopes will increase the efficacy of restoration and vegetation treatment approaches. If successful, the state hopes that an organized state, federal, and regional shared partnership will help catalyze the growing force of inspired and dedicated individuals from within and outside of government working together and with the communities to make our communities safer and our natural lands healthier. Scaling up to meet our state and federal goals appears possible but



scaffolding is needed to be in place to do so. Emphasis on equitable power distribution is also key in ensuring that such scaffolding is durable.

## The Watershed Research and Training Center's Recommendations

Under the auspices of the FMTF and the RFFC Programs, the Legislature, the governor's office, lawmakers, and state agencies have directed and empowered regional and local leaders, and stakeholders to work together on novel regional planning processes targeted at enhancing community and landscape resilience to the threats of wildland fire via vegetation management. In both cases, the direction was for appointed leaders to work in collaboration with a diversity of stakeholders to co-develop plans, including prioritized lists of projects, to facilitate more informed, efficient and effective funding through a range of state programs.

The "regions" identified for the respective initiatives do not directly align, instead having been developed for nuanced reasons unique to each initiative. The leaders empowered to head-up the respective planning processes are also different in most cases, once again lending to the origins of the directives and funding authorities. Based on the RFFC funding distribution, what defines a region in the case of RFFC appears to have been determined by the geographies covered by existing multi-county (usually) landscape-scale oriented entities with (what the DOC viewed as) high fiscal and program management capacity (i.e., state conservancies, a regional Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, or well-established resource conservation districts). Re-examination of the appropriateness of these scales and geographies is recommended, given the variation in size (1-22 counties per region, for example) and the exclusion of many California counties.

Charged with making prioritized recommendations for funding and action, leaders and participants desire to better understand both their responsibilities and the authorities within the program areas and directives they are operating under. They also strive to understand and increase the alignment of these novel planning efforts with other existing planning processes. This need for understanding is particularly heightened by the newly signed Shared Stewardship Agreement between the state of California and the USDA Forest Service. This agreement provides a powerful partnership mechanism, and clarifying how these regional groups and their plans fit into that agreement and associated 20-year plan is paramount.

Operating with somewhat limited statutory and programmatic direction, and having received verbal assurances from both FMTF leadership and RFFC Program leaders at Department of Conservation that they had broad flexibility to tailor the planning processes and products to their unique ecological, social and institutional contexts, each initiative has taken on its own character.

There has been substantial effort by leaders of these various initiatives to find alignment across FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups and RFFC program regions, and to share best practices, innovations and learning across initiatives and regions.

Some challenges and questions remain outstanding that could warrant additional consideration by leaders at the Legislature, FMTF, Department of Conservation, and across Natural Resource Agency departments. In particular, clarifying how the resulting plans will be used in grant making, agency-level project prioritization, and other existing state planning processes and documents (e.g., CAL FIRE unit-level fire plans) could improve the efficiency of planning efforts and provide more clarity for both leaders and participants about how their investments of time and energy will translate to competing for future planning and implementation funding. Given that so much of the participation, and even leadership, is expected to be voluntary and supported by other funding streams, this clarity is important to sustaining broad and diverse participation, particularly for groups and individuals operating on highly-constrained budgets.

We also recognize that while the FMTF regions represent the entire geography of California, the RFFC program left 18 counties out of its prescribed regional planning efforts. As discussed earlier, addressing these inequities in both planning support and a pathway for submitting plans for consideration are important, yet missing from the state's current prioritization planning approach.

Also, although it is well-intentioned that the RFFC program seeks to include tribal engagement, tribes are not merely stakeholders, they are sovereign nations, regardless of how or if Euro-Americans recognize them. It is our perspective that while the RFFC planning process should most certainly seek to include tribal priorities, this cannot and should not be the only way that tribal priorities are conveyed to California leadership, and tribal contributions to the RFFC should not be expected without compensation. The approach the North Coast Resource Partnership is taking with paid tribal liaisons is perhaps a promising model for other regions to consider. Nevertheless, the state should primarily be engaging Tribal Nations directly, using the appropriate government-to-government approach, rather than a non-indigenous third party such

as a regional block grantee. It is worth noting that the Department of Conservation, with additional support from the Resource Legacy Fund and Hewlett Foundation, is also investing in a tribally-led and tribally-focused effort around intertribal coordination that may lead to new related structures and funding mechanisms moving forward.

Also regarding outreach, fostering genuinely inclusive and representative local perspectives, especially of underrepresented communities at scales as large as the RFFC program, is a tall order that warrants acknowledging. Evaluation of the efficacy in this regard is essential if this approach is to be replicated/extended. In interviews with the state, the FMTF planning approach was described as intended to be agency led and “top down,” with RFFC complementing that from the “bottom up.” However, there is an inherent struggle with this approach, given that multi-county, regionally-focused state conservancies and similar are not often perceived by local communities as grassroots or “bottom up” entities. Ideally, the nimble nature of the RFFC program (i.e., block grantees determining their own sub-grant/sub-contracting processes, the requirement of demonstration projects, and the collaborative planning processes) accommodate for that challenge, and there is surely increased efficacy in making fewer, larger investments with known regional organizations. From our interviews with RFFC planning entities, it appears that the block grant recipients are doing their due diligence to maximize local and inclusive participation, but again, evaluation in this regard is recommended.

Lastly, the focus on vegetation management within these plans arguably makes them incomplete from a fire adaption point of view (i.e., many southern California wildfire issues are more tightly bound to ignition management and wind conditions rather than vegetation management), yet perhaps this is unavoidable, at least within the RFFC plans, considering the corresponding funding and legislation. In the future, ideally the state will support additional regional planning initiatives that support the non-vegetation management aspects of community and landscape wildfire resilience.

Overall, the creativity, dedication and good-faith collaboration of leaders and participants is leading to both thoughtful and meaningful regional planning processes, and we expect that RFFC-funded efforts in particular will yield the desired prioritized project lists and plans. We anticipate that thorough program evaluations across each initiative, and among initiatives, will lead to improved direction and process in the future, especially if the FMTF and RFFC programs can coordinate more with additional landscape-level, forest management and restoration-focused efforts occurring at the state level, including future iterations of the Sierra Institute’s

Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement program (“SCALE”), the California Landscape Stewardship Network, and the Department of Conservation’s Watershed Coordinators program. We are also in communication with California Legislative staff to understand the intersection of these programs with additional legislation, such as Assembly Bill 38, etc. Lastly, we recommend that relevant agency and administration leaders participate with the leaders of these various regional planning efforts in a shared-evaluation to ensure that learning is captured and adaptive measures are identified and adopted.

# Appendix A. Examples from the Field

## A-1. Draft NCRP Regional Priority Plan Process

The key deliverable for the North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP) forestry and fire block grant is a regional plan that includes priority actions, strategies and projects. A draft of the regional plan outline is included below for review. Following are the proposed steps for developing the regional plan:

- Develop a draft annotated outline of the plan for review by the California Natural Resources Agency, (CNRA), CA Department of Conservation (DOC), NCRP Policy Review Panel (PRP), NCRP Forestry Ad Hoc Committee, NCRP Technical Peer Review Committee (TPRC), and eventually the NCRP Forest Advisors.
- Integrate input from the above reviewers into a draft of the plan to be re-circulated to the above group for a second round of review, and to other key partners such as Watershed Research and Training Center, CA Fire Safe Council, the North Coast RCD coalition
- Identify a comprehensive list of forest health and fuel load reduction projects for the North Coast region using the following methods:
  - Regional screening level analysis using remote sensing to determine areas of heavy fuel loading, vulnerable communities, etc. Methods for this analysis will be reviewed by local, state, academic and federal experts in remote sensing and mapping, as well as by the NCRP advisors listed above.
  - Identify a comprehensive list of projects via interviews, cross-walking with existing project lists for the region (ex: CAL FIRE and CWPP project lists), and a formal NCRP RFP process proposed for deployment in late December
  - NCRP formal RFP process will consist of a short form for conceptual or preliminary projects where no clear funding source has been identified, and a long form for demonstration projects
- Evaluate and rank the identified projects using criteria reviewed by the advisors listed above
- Incorporate key information from the regional remote sensing/mapping, interview and RFP process into the draft plan (eg, summarize needs, priorities and recommendations derived from the mapping/analysis, interview and RFP processes)
- Incorporate any lessons learned from the demonstration projects into the draft plan
- Circulate final draft plan to advisors, incorporate suggested revisions
- Circulate revised final draft via NCRP website
- Finalize plan

## A-2. Increasing the Capacity of Established Groups throughout the Sierra Nevada Region

The following examples are some of the ways the Sierra Nevada Conservancy is increasing capacity throughout the Sierra Nevada region by empowering groups to expand on and enhance what they were already doing.

- The Pit/Fall River RCDs received a DOC Watershed Coordinator grant which includes a project planning and prioritization process. They are also closely engaged with the Burney Hat-Creek collaborative to develop and implement collaborative projects. Their planning process currently covers the Fall River (Burney) area, using Spatial Informatics (and also 34 North). They have been granted \$100,000 in RFFC program funds to extend this planning effort to the Pit watershed as well.
- Modoc County initiated a Modoc Resource Sustainability Group which has broad local support and involvement. They have created a map of the last 10-year's forest health/fire prevention projects as well as projected projects, which they use to prioritize project implementation. The County was awarded \$120,000 in support to the Modoc RCD for the facilitation of Modoc Resource Sustainability Group. The funding will also be used to move forward with priority project planning and CEQA/NEPA.
- Yosemite-Sequoia RC&D (Y-S RC&D) is already the project manager of a project identification and prioritization process for the Sierra National Forest funded by CAL FIRE CCI funding. American Forests has started a broader mapping process for this Subregion, working with the Southern Sierra Leadership Forum and other collaborative efforts. The additional RFFC program funding will allow the extension and support of mapping efforts for the Sequoia NF, NP and NM. The Great Basin Institute will provide 'pipeline' development of three priority projects in the southern part of the Subregion, which is generally left out of grants and project development.
- The Tuolumne River Trust was already selected to do planning and project coordination through a DOC Watershed Coordinator grant. We have provided about \$30,000 for them to initiate a 'Structure from Motion' drone-based LiDAR system to enhance planning and monitoring for those efforts.

- Two adjacent forest collaboratives, the Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions and the Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group were both working separately on developing software systems to map the collaboratives' projects for the benefit of collective planning. During our first eWorkshop, these two groups got an opportunity to share these efforts with one another and decided that they would work together and share resources as it makes sense for their respective projects.

## A-3. Working with a Diverse Group of Stakeholders and Partners in a Long-Standing Collaborative Group

The Inland Empire Resource Conservation District has been working in coordination with the Inland Empire Fire Safe Alliance (IEFSA) on the Regional Priority Plan for the San Bernardino Mountains. The IEFSA has been established since 2003, and represents a variety of stakeholders in the area.

Inland Empire Fire Safe Alliance Meeting Members:

*Groups listed in **bold** are regularly attending members and non-bold members participate periodically*

### Agencies

**USFS – San Bernardino National Forest**

**CAL FIRE**

**San Bernardino County Fire**

**San Bernardino County Code**

**Enforcement**

**Inland Empire Resource Conservation District**

Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District

Caltrans

**California Conservation Corps**

**Local Fire Departments from communities**

South Coast Air Quality Management District

Natural Resources Conservation Service

### Fire Safe Councils

**Mountain Rim FSC**

**Angelus Oaks FSC**

**Wrightwood FSC**

Oak Glen FSC

Arrowhead Communities FSC

**Mt. Baldy FSC**

### Others

**Southern California Edison**

National Forest Foundation

San Manuel Tribal Fire

Wildlands Conservancy

UC Cooperative Extension/Master Gardeners



## A-4. Coastal Region Prioritization Plan Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather project information for forest health and fire prevention projects within the FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group area. The project information will be

used to provide an increased level of awareness and collaboration to achieve the goals of the FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group, which are listed here:

<https://fmtf.fire.ca.gov/regional-prioritization-groups/coastal/>

### Survey Questions:

- Contact Info
- Project Description
- Project Planning Stage
  - Study and Planning
  - Permitting/Regulatory Compliance
  - Ready for Implementation
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Location, County, Veg Type, LatLong, Mapping Data, Acreage, # of landowners, contiguous or separate
- Support from local partners?
  - Fire Department or Fire District
  - County Board of Supervisors
  - Fire Safe Council
  - Resource Conservation District (RCD)
  - Other
- Project Activities
  - Hazardous Fuels Reduction
  - Prescribed Fire
  - Biomass Utilization
  - Pest Management
  - Reforestation
  - Research as a Component of Project
  - Research as Stand-Alone Project
  - Fire Prevention Education
  - Fire Prevention Planning
  - Large, Landscape-scale project with multiple landowners

- Vegetation Treatments
  - Vegetation Removal and/or Tree Removal
  - Prescribed Fire - broadcast, with pretreatment needed
  - Prescribed Fire - broadcast, without pretreatment needed
  - Prescribed Fire - pile burn
  - Chipping
  - Mastication
- Permitting or regulatory hurdles? If so, what?
- Capacity barriers? If so, what?
- Which FMTF Working Groups would you like to collaborate with to address hurdles and barriers?
  - Forest Management & Restoration
  - Regulations
  - Prescribed Fire
  - Landowner Education & Outreach
  - Wood Utilization
  - Tree Mortality
  - Science Advisory Panel
- Additional Info?