

REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS OF REGIONAL PRIORITY PLANNING PROCESSES IN CALIFORNIA: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

There are two primary, concurrent regional forest and fire planning efforts occurring in California: those led by the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) grantees – top map – and those being explored by the Forest Management Task Force (FMTF) Regional Prioritization Groups – bottom map. (While you will need to refer to the [full report](#) to view larger maps, the maps offer a coarse orientation and comparison.) This study summarizes the different approaches being taken by the parties leading both the RFFC and FMTF regional prioritization processes. These efforts were deliberately created in tandem, in 2018, but through different mechanisms. 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.” These regional priority plans are still in development, and the processes are ongoing. Many groups are still in the early developmental stages of regional priority planning, yet are certainly far enough along to compare them to one another. The following tables provide helpful metrics and descriptions related to each planning effort.



SUMMARY OF REGIONAL PRIORITY PLANNING PROCESSES

	Forest Management Taskforce				RFFC Grant Recipient					
	Northern Region Prioritization Group	Sierra and Eastside Region Prioritization Group	Coastal Region Prioritization Group	Southern Region Prioritization Group	North Coast Resource Partnership	Sierra Nevada Conservancy	California State Coastal Conservancy	Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy	Inland-Empire Resource Conservation District	Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County
Geographic Scale: Number of Counties (including portions of counties)	17	23	12	8	9	21	11	2	2	1
Overall Process	Monthly planning calls. Identified interested stakeholders, established a collaborative process, and developed a project spreadsheet. Working closely with North Coast Resource Partnership to reduce duplication of efforts.	Monthly planning calls. Working towards understanding the scale, distribution, and objectives of planned projects across the region. Working closely with Sierra Nevada Conservancy to reduce duplication of efforts.	Bi-monthly planning calls. Working with California State Coastal Conservancy subgrantees to develop a regional priority plan.	Monthly planning calls to share regionally pertinent information.	Inclusive process across the region, using landscape-scale GIS analysis, a list of projects, and a regional priority plan.	Building capacity across the region and investing in collaboratives that were already formed.	Subgrantees are generating local plans, and working with the Coastal Region Prioritization Group to develop a regional plan.	Hiring a private consultant to work on landscape-level analysis and the development of a regional priority plan.	Using the Inland Empire Fire Safe Alliance, a long-standing collaborative, as a platform for a regional priority plan.	Strategic meetings with a multitude of stakeholders. Hired a forestry specialist to assist with RFFC planning.
Project Identification	Created a survey to collect projects from stakeholders.	Created a survey to collect projects from stakeholders.	Created a survey to collect projects from stakeholders, specifically including California State Coastal Conservancy subgrantees.	No project identification is occurring.	Regional-level spatial analysis, review of existing plans, RFPs, and stakeholder interviews.	Subgrantees are identifying projects in their respective areas and developing lists.	Most subgrantees are working directly with the FMTF Coastal Region Prioritization Group to identify projects.	Still deciding how to identify projects.	Creating a comprehensive list of projects utilizing Inland Empire Fire Safe Alliance's expertise and existing CWPPs.	Partners are developing independent project lists.

SUMMARY OF REGIONAL PRIORITY PLANNING PROCESSES, CONTINUED

	Forest Management Taskforce				RFFC Grant Recipient					
	Northern Region Prioritization Group	Sierra and Eastside Region Prioritization Group	Coastal Region Prioritization Group	Southern Region Prioritization Group	North Coast Resource Partnership	Sierra Nevada Conservancy	California State Coastal Conservancy	Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy	Inland-Empire Resource Conservation District	Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County
Approaches to Public Outreach and Engagement	This group is open to any interested stakeholder.	This group is open to any interested stakeholder.	This group is open to any interested stakeholder.	This group is open to any interested stakeholder.	Website outreach, email list, and all meetings are open to the public.	Subgrantees will do their own outreach.	Subgrantees will do their own outreach. Ex: Engaging the local fire safe councils.	Still to be determined. They are interested in reaching out and working with disadvantaged communities.	Working with Inland Empire Fire Safe Alliance, which is community-led. Would like to host community meetings with maps and markers.	Still to be determined. They want to ensure that their regional priority plan has a cohesive representation of interested stakeholders.
Lessons Learned to Date	Clear direction and purpose is necessary to keep this type of collaborative group moving forward.	These processes take a lot of time and effort, and stakeholders need to understand the end result.	Stakeholders need to understand the big picture. Need a better way to convey that at the beginning.	Needs to be geographically tighter to be effective in project planning and prioritization.	Take time to develop an outline for the plan.	Active, regular communication with subgrantees is critical.	Subgrantees said working with existing collaboratives is helpful.	Too early in the planning process to share lessons learned.	Learn what is already in development in the region at the start.	Be adaptable and remember it is always a work in progress.
End Products	Project spreadsheet to help focus funding efforts in the region.	Project list for future California Climate Investments call for proposals.	Project list for collaboration and planning, and may be incorporated into CAL FIRE Unit Fire Plans, CWPP's, and the Regional Priority Plan.	This is a regional information sharing group, there is no end product.	One regional plan with multiple chapters.	An interactive map linked to the subgrantees priority plans and projects.	Subgrantees are creating subregional plans, and working with the Coastal Region Prioritization Group on a regional priority plan.	To be determined.	A regional priority plan and an internet planning tool with links to project-specific folders.	A document with areas of concern, who is responsible for what areas, a list of prioritized projects, and a map.

As shown in the tables prior, these planning approaches offer a variety of opportunities; those are discussed in more length in the full report.

OBSTACLES

Direction and Authority for RFFC Groups

Although groups agree that flexibility is important, and they want the ability to have “regional endeavors led by regional endeavors,” the majority of groups thought that a better framework for the priority plans is needed, 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 group 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 to tell individuals, organizations, and agencies what to do, but voiced concerns about being tasked with that role. 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. Further, some groups are not wanting to prioritize projects due to a lack of guidance and the perceived liability when it comes to projects being selected for grant funding. There is also a lack of understanding why projects need to be ranked or prioritized, and how that will affect future funding opportunities. Finally, there is a belief 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.

Reflections from Planning Leads:

“It would have been nice to have clearer direction that there is no direction.”

-RFFC Grantee

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 also wanted more guidance on, and reasoning behind, ranking projects.

OBSTACLES (continued)

Communication

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 regular approach to frequent communication could help define the respective groups' roles. Although there are examples of strong working relationships between FMTF Regional Prioritization Groups and RFFC block grantees, there seems to be some difficulties with communication, and confusion of roles and responsibilities, among the groups.



*Photo Credit: Ed Keith
Deschutes County*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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 its associated 20-year plan is paramount.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(continued)

Further, there needs to be a mechanism to ensure that the 18 counties left out of the RFFC program and their priorities are locally identified and considered by the state in conjunction with the other plans being supported. The concept of regionalized planning traces back to California's Forest Carbon Plan and Executive Order B-52-18; however, the efficiency and appropriateness of regional planning, and using these specific regions requires iterative evaluation. It is also important that the state find ways to support the prioritization and planning of non-vegetation management wildfire adaptation actions, which likely will require identifying funding not tied to the reduction of Greenhouse Gases.



*Photo Credit: Mike Caggiano,
Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, Colorado State University*

*This analysis was conducted by a team at the Watershed Research and Training Center:
Allison Jolley, Erin Banwell, and Nick Goulette.*

The Watershed Center is a non-profit working to advance community and landscape resilience to wildland fire at the local, state and national levels.

*You can download the full report at:
thewatershedcenter.com/statewide*



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