

Report from the Fire MOU Partnership Meeting -Spring 2019

The Fire MOU was co-authored by Sierra Forest Legacy and the U.S. Forest Service in the fall of 2015 to support expanded use of fire for ecological and other resource benefits. Since then, the Fire MOU Partnership has grown to 37 member agencies and organizations throughout California.

In April, over 50 members of the Fire MOU Partnership gathered at the Wildland Fire Training Center in McClellan, California for our annual “indoor” meeting to share and learn the latest from key fire and forest ecologists working in California and beyond. The following is a summary of the discussions and presentations.

Expanding Fire Restoration in California

The busy morning session included excellent presentations by Courtney Schultz, Director of the Public Lands Policy Group and Associate Professor Forest and Natural Resource Policy at Colorado State University, on her work and report focused on Barriers to Burning ([Link](#)).

Following was Rob York, from UC Berkeley and Blodgett Research Forest, discussing Pyrosilviculture and integrating fire ecology, fire history and fire use into decisions into decisions about forest manipulations to meet management objectives.

Next up was Malcolm North, PSW and UC Davis researcher discussion fire and reforestation as part of his (and 24 other authors) examination of the failure of current (outdated) reforestation strategies that ignore fire’s role in the forests of California. Known as the “Pines in Lines” paper ([Link](#)), it has created a stir in the world of traditional silviculture and with those committed to highly flammable plantation forestry that fosters on-going fire suppression at the landscape scale.

Following Malcolm was Brandon Collins, PSW and UC Berkeley, discussing the role of mixed-severity fire in the Sierra Nevada and restoring fire in recently burned landscapes. Brandon is helping us think about tools to deal with historically uncharacteristically dense post-fire environments and managing post-fire fuel-loading with a range of tools including fire and the need for ongoing fire maintenance.

Wrapping up was Jamie Lyderson, fire ecologist now working for CAL FIRE’s Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP) on the topic of Pyrodiversity. Jamie discussed the various components of Pyrodiversity—fire interval, season of occurrence, fire size, fire severity, fire behavior—and pyrodiversity links to biodiversity. The role of fire suppression, fire exclusion and climate change are key to understanding changes in forest structure and our ability to create structural heterogeneity with prescribed fire, or wildfire managed for multiple resource benefits.

All fire presenters then sat for panel discussion and a great Q and A session before moving to our Operational Smoke Management session in the afternoon.

The Smoke Management Strategy session in the afternoon was a three hour, structured discussion between air quality scientists, air regulators and the meeting members that explored and captured the thoughts of the participants, using a topic outline to focus the discussion and two excellent note-takers to capture the key points. The session was focused on the collaborative efforts of fire managers and air quality regulators to craft operational guidelines for a state-of-the-art smoke management strategy, ([Link](#)) working with federal (EPA) and state (CARB) and local air districts to advance the three pillars of the strategy—monitoring-modeling-messaging—for the expanding fire restoration program in California. On this front, SFL worked hard in 2018 to support a \$2 million-dollar state budget line item to cover the costs associated with expanding monitoring equipment, training, maintenance and expanded modeling expertise plus coordinated fire and smoke messaging efforts throughout California.

California’s unprecedented and growing partnership between air regulators and fire managers has resulted from the shared understanding that there is NO-NO FIRE option for California given our very fire-promoting climate and strongly fire-associated vegetation types throughout most of the state. Three California air districts (Butte, El Dorado, and Placer Counties) have joined the Fire MOU and the California Air Resources Board staff are actively engaged with fire managers to expand restorative burning and improve protection of public health. The Operational Guidelines for State-of-the-Art Smoke Management Implementation draft ([Link](#)) is the result of Lee Tarnay and Trent Procter from the Forest Service and Dar Mims and Michael Benjamin from the CARB sitting through many discussions over the past three years with agency and NGO partners, tackling tough issues such as the need to significantly expand burning and to protect the public health of our 40 million residents in California. The West is burning but California is leading the way in addressing “Living With Fire” and shared goals of public health protection in a collaborative, science-based Operational Guidelines for State-of-the-Art Smoke Management Implementation.