

SUSTAINABLE OUTDOOR RECREATION COLLABORATIVE (SORC)

Virtual Meeting | October 28, 2020

Summary

Meeting Purpose

- Review status of assorted SORC organizational efforts
- Receive update from Forest Service on Covid-19 & planning projects
- Receive update from Forest Service on fire impacts and related recovery efforts, including opportunities for volunteer involvement
- Review and expand on process for identifying possible projects to be funded by *Great American Outdoors Act*
- Discussion of key timelines for SORC activities and review of next steps

Welcome, Introductions, Zoom Overview, Agenda Review

Austin McNerny, facilitator from the Consensus and Collaboration Program at California State University, Sacramento, welcomed participants to the third meeting of the Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (SORC) for the Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5) of the United States Forest Service (USFS).

Mr. McNerny indicated that the meeting was being recorded; the recording can be accessed [here](#). See Appendix A for a list of meeting participants, as self-reported.

Mr. McNerny noted that a range of stakeholders participate in the SORC, but there are still some user perspectives that are not represented. He asked participants to help with identification of and outreach to missing stakeholders.

SORC Organizational Matters

Review/Acceptance of Meeting #2 Summary

Mr. McNerny noted that USFS staff had provided some detailed comments via email which would be incorporated into the draft Meeting #2 summary. Participants were given a chance to share comments on the draft summary. No comments or edits were shared.

Status of Update to SORC Principles and Definition of “Sustainable Recreation”

Mr. McNerny said that additional revision of the SORC Principles and definition of “sustainable recreation” are needed in order to reach agreement by all SORC participants. He said that rather than discuss the definition during the full SORC meetings, working groups would be formed to address stakeholder concerns and develop proposed Principles and definition for review by the full SORC. In the pre-meeting survey, some participants indicated their interest in participating in these working groups and anyone else interested was invited to contact the facilitation team in order to be included in the process. Mr. McNerny affirmed that the working group would build on the feedback that SORC participants had already shared during previous meetings.

Review/Feedback on SORC Website and Logos

After feedback during the second SORC meeting, USFS worked on a new logo for the group. In the pre-meeting survey, a roughly equal number of participants expressed support and opposition for the new logo. Those opposed noted that it shows only one kind of recreation, leaving many feeling like their interests are not represented. Mr. McNerny noted that with the wide range of types of recreation, it would be very challenging to represent all users within the logo. He asked whether members would be in favor of removing the people from the logo so that it focused on the landscape with a trail without showing people in the landscape. Using a yes/no feature in the Zoom platform, 12 participants expressed support for this change and 3 expressed opposition. Participants shared the following feedback about the logo:

- The logo should show human interaction with the landscape, because the focus of the SORC is on recreation. Consider showing a person sitting, which may be more inclusive.
- Consider showing people standing, but without packs and sticks so that the interpretation is less narrow.
- Consider creating a logo that is word-based rather than image based, so that it can include all kinds of recreation.
- Consider creating a series of logos showing a variety of recreation types and using a banner with multiple logos to encompass the range.

Proposal for 2021 Meeting Schedule and Process

Mr. McNerny said that the feedback provided in the pre-meeting survey would be referenced in determining the topics of future meetings. The SORC would meet once per month, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. on the last Wednesday of each month beginning in the new year: January 27, February 24, March 31, and April 28, 2021.

Update from Forest Service (Covid-19 and Planning)

Regional Forester Randy Moore shared an overview of current efforts and challenges at the USFS Region 5. He said that the pandemic has shown that recreation is a key public need and should be a vital part of shared stewardship of public lands. The SORC is an opportunity to set an example of what shared stewardship is, with USFS participating collaboratively with groups to determine what is needed on and from public lands. Passage of the *Great American Outdoors Act* presents an opportunity to reorganize around a comprehensive approach to managing and investing in facilities, including determining whether and how to replace the facilities that were lost in recent fires or to develop new ones. The SORC can help the Region incorporate a recreation perspective rather than only a natural resource focus, to improve accessibility. USFS is currently in a budget reorganization process, through which each forest will focus on managing the organization and programs within it, but the budget will be managed at the Regional level. The work being undertaken is not dependent upon the federal leadership and will continue regardless of the outcomes of the upcoming election.

Participants shared appreciation for the efforts of the USFS in Region 5 to meet the many challenges this year.

Covid-19 Related Updates

John Exline, USFS, shared updates related to Covid-19 and fire recovery. The Region has had 105 confirmed Covid-19 cases among staff. The USFS established a three-phase system for reopening. The Region 5 regional office, along with 16 other units, is in Phase 1. Modoc National Forest is the only unit

in Phase 2, which includes more staff working from the office and allows for the public to come to the office by appointment. There are no units in Phase 3, which is the final and least restrictive phase. Due to spikes in cases around the country and in California, including in rural areas, as well as concerns about continued spikes as colder weather and holidays arrive, there is currently a holding pattern in terms of movement through the phases.

The Region has also been contending with many fires; at one point, there were upwards of 19,000 firefighters working in the Region, as compared with 5,000 normally. In coordination with county health departments on testing and isolation, Covid cases have been contained. The national and Regional offices are running a program called Operation Care and Recovery to support employees and communities that have been affected by the fires and hurricanes. In terms of facility and infrastructure recovery, the top priority is assessing damage. The Region is running Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) to get ahead of potential hazards related to fire impacts as winter arrives. Long-term recovery will include ecosystem restoration.

A participant asked how the Region will communicate with the public about the outcomes of the assessments currently being done. Mr. Exline said that the Region has a BAER team for each fire, and each of these includes a public affairs officer in charge of communicating about this kind of information. He noted that there will be many opportunities for collaboration on restoring impacted areas, but the assessment is only skimming the surface at this time. In some instances, USFS may consider redesigning amenities to address current needs while ensuring the public continues to have access.

Sierra & Sequoia National Forest Management Plans

Chris Colvin, USFS, provided updates on the Region's forest plan updates. Both the Sierra and Sequoia National Forests have faced major fire impacts, and USFS is assessing whether any related changes are needed to the environmental impact statements (EIS). In the Sierra National Forest, close to half of the plan area is within the fire perimeter, so there may be changed conditions impacting the EIS, though USFS still anticipates releasing the EIS in early 2021. The fire in the Sequoia National Forest is mostly outside of the forest plan revision area, but the fire has nevertheless had a major impact on the ground.

Northwest Forest Planning Effort Status

The anticipated Northwest Forest Planning effort is still pending, awaiting a decision from the USFS Chief that is required to begin the process. Though this decision is still forthcoming, the national office is support preparation for the planning effort. A bioregional assessment for the area was completed in July 2020 and the Region is preparing for internal and external engagement, anticipated to begin in November 2020 and early 2021, respectively.

A participant asked about the status of revisions in the forests that conducted the pre-assessment planning phase. A group of forests referred to as the "next adopters" (following the "early adopters," which were the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo Forests) conducted pre-assessment planning, however the national office decided to reorient planning toward the northwest planning area, so those "next adopters" in the Central Sierra are no longer up next for revisions.

A participant asked what the internal engagement for the Northwest Forest Planning effort would entail. The majority of Forest Service staff that are involved in the forest plan revision process have positions

that cover other duties as well, rather than focusing exclusively on the revisions. The internal engagement is focused on integrating those staff, and provides training related to the internal direction, rules, and roles in the process.

Fire Impacts and Recovery Planning

Preliminary Assessment of Impacts within Region 5 Zones

Garrett Villanueva, USFS, shared about the preliminary assessment of fire impacts within the Region 5 zones. USFS employed a Burned Infrastructure Rapid Assessment to quickly understand the infrastructure impacts at a regional scale. Across California's National Forest system lands, 1.6 million acres were burned in over 1,200 fires. Regional fire restrictions continue due to significant fire potential through November. The rapid assessment overlaid fire perimeter information over infrastructure maps to determine the potential impacts, with aerial photography used to supplement this information in some cases. Mr. Villanueva emphasized that fires which are fully contained may still be burning and could potentially continue to burn into the next fire season.

Possible Role for Properly Trained Volunteers

Mr. Villanueva shared how partners can support USFS in addressing the fire impacts. A key need at this time is supporting communication with the public about continued fire danger and encouraging responsible behavior, as well as sharing about the scale of the impacts and the time it will take for a full recovery and rebuilding of infrastructure.

Moving forward to post-wildfire recovery, anyone entering areas with active fires must be working with the Forest and the incident command team in the area and hold a red card. Districts and Forests will be completing assessments and identifying planning needs, including estimating losses and funding needs. Next year, they will be conducting drainage maintenance, slough removal, sign replacement, and other maintenance. Because burned trees can fall at any time, USFS will need to take care in determining when and how to reopen trails. The landscape needs to restabilize, with vegetation beginning to return, before trails can be reopened.

A participant asked about assessment of damage to waterways and suggested that user groups with expertise on rivers could support such assessment. Mr. Villanueva said that the rapid assessment would only identify specific infrastructure within burned areas, such as bridges. The next step in assessment, currently underway, is ecosystem assessment, which will likely cover impacts to rivers. The best way to get involved in this work is at the local District and Forest levels. Mr. Villanueva said that stakeholder groups could ask staff at those levels what support needs they have, but also noted that fires are still being actively fought and it is likely that at this time they will not be able to engage volunteers safely on the ground. Mr. Bacon said that the BAER teams will also be looking at rivers, and similarly noted that follow up on this will be necessary but the process is still in an assessment phase.

A participant said that for communities located among National Forest lands, support for forest closures is hard to maintain over time, as the communities are deeply impacted. The participant said that the Region should work with such communities to mitigate those impacts and suggested that the SORC could be a place to begin those discussions. Additionally, the participant noted that having additional

information about where fires might or might not move when they are active would be helpful for communities.

A participant suggested that USFS work to simplify its messaging around fire impacts and restrictions, for example using the phrasing of “no fires” instead of “fire restrictions,” which can seem to imply that some fires are allowed.

Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) Planning

Nancy Parachini, USFS, gave an overview of the Region’s GAOA funding and project selection process. At a national scale, USFS will receive \$285 million annually for five years to support deferred maintenance. The Parks Service will receive \$1.6 billion annually; Ms. Parachini noted that the sudden increase in funding to both agencies could present a challenge in securing partners and contractors to help implement the projects that the funding will support. At the USFS, the funding will be split between transportation and non-transportation assets. Trails are considered non-transportation assets, which makes them eligible for more funding.

GAOA funding has to follow the annual appropriations process, so the Region had to propose project for the first two years very quickly. For fiscal year (FY) 2021, the first year funded, the Region already had to submit proposed projects, which are now moving forward but will not be final until approved through the appropriations bill. The projects for the first year focused on projects that would address deferred maintenance needs and were shovel-ready, with NEPA processes completed. For FY 2022, the Region needs to submit the list of proposed projects by November 15, 2020. For FY22, the USFS set required criteria at the national level, including addressing deferred maintenance, having leverage for the projects from partners, and other metrics and indices related to evaluating infrastructure. For both FY21 and FY22, the total USFS funding was allocated through a set regional allocation as well as additional funding disbursed from the national level.

Ms. Parachini shared a list of the projects the Region proposed for FY21, which include 105 projects for the Regional selection and 23 for the national competition. She noted that some of the zones within the Region may appear over- or under-represented in the list of FY21 proposed projects, but that over the five years of GAOA funding, top priorities in each of the zones will be addressed.

Ms. Parachini identified the following opportunities for partnership during this process:

- Inventory and assessment of recreation infrastructure including estimation of deferred maintenance.
- Project Implementation
- Development training for current and future opportunities:
 - Crew leadership
 - Trail skills and certifications, including youth
 - Increase land stewardship capacity across the region
- Out year priority setting – 2023 and beyond

Ms. Parachini said that the Region will look to dialogue with the SORC about out-year priority setting, including about how to move from focusing on shovel-ready projects to a comprehensive regional

strategy, including identifying projects and priorities by zone and identifying gaps in the funding thus far.

Mr. Bacon noted that the focus of GAOA funding is on deferred maintenance and constructing new infrastructure is generally outside of the intent of the Act. A participant asked whether there is a requirement for communications and engagement related to GAOA. USFS staff said that there is not an explicit requirement within GAOA, but that it is expected, and the Region is developing a plan. The Region recognizes the opportunity, due to the confluence of GAOA, Covid-19, and the extreme fire season to be creative and thoughtful about building anew. The line officers and district rangers from around the Region will join the upcoming SORC meetings to support engagement and collaboration. USFS hopes that SORC members will continue to engage their respective stakeholders as well.

A participant asked whether additional staff will be hired to administer the GAOA funding. USFS staff said that this had been brought up internally and they expected that they would get some support, though influxes of funding and staff are expected to be limited.

A participant emphasized the importance of setting realistic expectations about what the GAOA funding will accomplish while also utilizing good models of partnership and ensuring that stakeholders can provide input.

Next Steps and Desired Future Agenda Topics

Mr. McNerny shared a proposal, discussed by the Steering Committee, for the next SORC meetings to focus on zone-by-zone discussions of recreation and volunteer opportunities, including helping to identify projects for GAOA funding for FY23 as well as how volunteer groups can engage in implementation of the FY21 and FY22 projects. Within this proposed structure, there would be one meeting dedicated to each zone, and information would be shared, and some input gathered ahead of the meeting to help ensure that stakeholders from each given zone would join the SORC to participate in the discussions. The SORC would meet once per month, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. on the last Wednesday of each month beginning in the new year: January 27, February 24, March 31, and April 28, 2021.

Mr. McNerny encourage participants to share information about the SORC and its upcoming meetings with the groups they know that work in the respective zones so that they can join the dialogue. The January meeting will focus on the Southern California zone.

A participant suggested that groups participating in the SORC partner with one another to mobilize tools and expertise, for example providing training to advance skills that will help with some of the recovery efforts discussed during the meeting. Another participant encouraged SORC members to work with stakeholders they may be less familiar with, for example the motorized community; while groups may not agree on some land use questions, they do agree on the importance of the forests and the communities that use them.

Mr. Bacon encouraged participants to contact the Regional Office and/or their local forests for continued touch points beyond the formal SORC meetings.

Appendix A: Participant List

The participant list below represents those who noted their presence via a virtual sign-in sheet.

SORC Participants

- Amy Granat, California Off-Road Vehicle Association
- Bob Kingman, Sierra Nevada Conservancy
- Chris Horgan, Stewards of the Sequoia
- Danna Stroud, CALREC Vision
- David Page, Winter Wildlands Alliance/Outdoor Alliance
- Emilyn Sheffield, CSU Chico
- Ian Nelson, PCTA's Regional Representative for Northern California/Southern Oregon
- Jennifer Tripp, Pacific Crest Trail Association
- Jennifer Mulholland-Bearhs, California Outdoor Engagement Coalition/ Inclusion Outdoors
- Katie Goodwin, Access Fund California
- Katie Hawkins, Outdoor Alliance California
- Kevin Bazar, Sierra Snowmobile Foundation
- Laurel Harkness, Siskiyou Outdoor Recreation Alliance /Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals
- Matt Dietz, The Wilderness Society
- Michael Reitzell, Ski California
- Ryan Henson, CalWild
- Stacy Corless, Mono County/Rural County Representatives of California
- Steve Messer, Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Association / CA MTB Coalition
- Susan Brock, DPR OHMVR Division
- Theresa Simsiman, American Whitewater
- Tyler Ray, American Hiking Society
- Troy Patton, Backcountry Horsemen CA

U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region Staff

- Randy Moore, Regional Forester
- Jim Bacon, Public Services Director, Pacific Southwest Region
- Nancy Parachini, Public Services Deputy Director, Pacific Southwest Region
- Kathy Mick, Program Manager for Volunteers, Service, Conservation Education, and Interpretive Services, Pacific Southwest Region
- John Exline, Director for Ecosystem Management, Pacific Southwest Region
- Chris Colvin, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Pacific Southwest Region
- Garrett Villanueva, Regional Trails Coordinator, Pacific Southwest Region

Consensus and Collaboration Program Facilitation Team

- Austin McNerny, Senior Mediator/Facilitator
- Julia Van Horn, Associate Mediator/Facilitator