



## Tree Mortality Task Force

### Tree Mortality Task Force Meeting Minutes

May 4, 2016

2:00p.m.-4:00p.m.

#### 1. Opening Comments

##### a. Chairpersons

i. Supervisor Worthley was absent.

b. Task Force Leader: Eric Coyne, Tulare County Resource Management

#### 2. Agenda Overview

##### a. Attendee Introduction (Kyria Martinez)

An introduction for all attendees was conducted including their name and place of employment.

##### b. Designated Sub-groups (Kyria Martinez)

We have been trying to create some local sub-groups. The state has seven working groups that meet once a month and they report back to the State Tree Mortality Task Force. Since we just created our task force, we want to go ahead and create some sub-groups within our local group. I have spoken with both Skip and Nancy about taking the lead in some of our groups. For those in the sub-groups, you would attend the state meeting via conference call and report back to our meeting. The sub-groups we came up with that copies the States are: Rules and Regulations, with Nancy Woods taking the lead, Forest Health and Resilience Group, Prescribed Fire Group, Public Outreach, Resource Allocation, Utilization-Bio Energy Group, which we've asked Skip if he would take the lead on since he is also already a member at the state level, and then the Utilization-Market Development Group.

##### Designated Sub-groups (Eric Coyne)

The main thing we are looking for is for someone to attend the state group to be a conduit back, since we all can't go to every meeting. We are not saying that because you are not the leader that you can't listen in on the meeting. We want one person as the lead, and at the very least provide the Minutes and an update so we can help coordinate and share this information with the other groups.

Designated Sub-groups (Kyria Martinez)

We have spoken with Brian in regards to the Forest Health, which meets monthly. For Mapping and Monitoring we have CAL Fire and Caltrans, PG&E, which also meets monthly. We are coming up with some objectives that each group will go through, which are also on the Fire Tree Mortality Task Force website.

The Mapping and Monitoring group and the Bio-Energy group have already met. Skip can give an update, and I will give an update on behalf of Reed.

## **2. County Specific Topics of Concern**

### **a. Creation of Local Sub-groups**

Requirements include attending the State Task Force monthly meetings, either in person or via teleconference call, and to report back to the County Task Force monthly meetings with Minutes and an update from the State level.

### **b. Update on Utilization-Bio Energy Group (Skip Barswick)**

With the RAM Program, there is an accelerated percentage of wood that has to be burned from the hazardous sites. Rio Bravo is required to burn 40% of Ag fuel, in order to cut down on the amount of open field burning in the valley. The fires in the forests in addition to the burning of Ag fuel will be detrimental to the valley, in regards to air quality as well as guidelines that are not met will result in the Federal Government taking over the programs. Rio Bravo's requirement of removal of trees in the hazard areas will increase from 40% for the first two years to 70% in three years and 80% in four years. Delano is currently at 68% Ag Fuel, Mendota is at 66%, Merced is 52%, Madera is currently closed, and Dinuba is at 100% and has been revamped and is ready to operation in anticipation of this program. The biggest issue has been getting enough funding to run the plants to operate. The State is trying to determine what is needed to get the plants ready to start burning, while looking for 170-180 kilowatts. PG&E is required to buy 20 kilowatts, Southern California Edison is required to buy 20 kilowatts, and San Diego Power and Energy is only required to buy 10 kilowatts. Under the program, that leaves 120-130 kilowatts remaining.

One of the biggest problems that has been discovered is the cost of moving the trees down to the plants. While a quote was given for \$90 per ton, with utilizing the Three Rivers area, it may be done at 50% of that price. The trees will be required to be shredded and chopped at the site of the trees being cut, will not be possible due to the inevitable damage to the forest floor as well as the use of 40-foot vans would be required, which will not be possible in some locations. This would result in the use of logging trucks, where there is enough funding by the CPUC for PG&E to complete the shredding and chopping portion.

There is only one or two plants that are ready to start operations, but there still remains the issue of costs and who will provide the funding for this program. Applications for Grants and Federal funding could take a year or more to obtain the funds.

### **c. State and Federal Funding (Eric Coyne)**

Resource Management will be presenting an agenda item to the Board of Supervisors in late May to get guidance on the issue of funding. Once all the information is gathered, it is expected to discuss the planning efforts, defining our problem, define possible solutions, projects and methods, and discuss the issue for long-term funding. Both State and Federal funding has been discussed. Federal funding is still being considered; however, money through FEMA for Hazardous Mitigation Planning is a process going through OES, the State, and into the Federal Level; which is still our long-range planning, but we need focus on short-range planning. Staff is concerned about having a well-formed plan before June 15<sup>th</sup>, prior to applying for funding. This will require approval from the Board to commit to use of funds while seeking reimbursement for a plan that has not been developed yet. There is some risk in seeking reimbursement with the possibility of disallowance of funding and being required to repay it. State funding would be easier to obtain. It is possible for funds specifically for tree mortality to be put into this coming year's budget. These two options are preferable to FEMA at this time.

The State is also gathering information from all the counties to forward up to the Federal level for a Federal Disaster Declaration, which would open up more federal options. We are looking for the best practicing to obtain funding. We will continue to look for already available funds to support our efforts, but we will still ask the Board of Supervisors for local assistance before going to the State or Federal levels.

d. Pilot Program (Skip Barswick)

Tulare County could obtain all the required information to find the true cost of this program. Adoption of an approved methodology is crucial to obtaining and not being required to repay the Grant. The big questions are: How many trees need to be removed? What is the cost of removal per tree?

**3. Mapping and Monitoring Working Group Update**

a. Reed Schenke (Relayed by Kyria Martinez)

RMA is working with CAL Fire, Edison, Caltrans, PG&E, and County Parks to update GIS files and updated maps. The objective of this database will be to incorporate three major features of the program operations. These are:

i. Current status to tree mortality areas of concern, which will be done through the use of aerial surveying from the Forest Service and others on the ground for more accurate data.

ii. Prioritize mitigation locations, which includes areas identified by task force as high value resources, such as emergency access routes, high value utility corridors, key fire suppression areas and sensitive environmental resources.

iii. Actively mitigate locations. Various agencies are working on individual projects to protect their primary interests.

We will be working with various groups to monitor and update the status of locations that have been inspected and cleared. Three locations have been identified as priority

locations. Those locations are: 1) Balch Park, Bear Creek Road, and surrounding Mountain Home Park and County Balch Park 2) Posey Rock, Poso Creek, Panorama Heights area 3) California Hot Springs and Pine Flat areas.

The areas with overlapping jurisdictions with State, Caltrans, and the Federal Government Park and Forest Services were not on the list to avoid doubling efforts in one location while missing others.

CAL Fire and County RMA are working to establish the “Boots on the Ground” method of inspecting the markings of dead trees. Our objective is to work on a part of Balch Park and Bear Creek to test the methodology.

b. Tree Mortality Area Maps (Pedro Ornelas)

We got a count of any county maintained roads within the tree mortality areas. We found 22,000 trees within our county maintained roads in those areas, which was done using aerial mapping and not boots on the ground. One map shows the entire county and who oversees those areas. The other two maps show the county’s priorities which includes any county infrastructure, i.e., camp grounds, mountain area communities that need fire access.

**4. Roundtable**

a. U.S. Forest Service

The last aerial view was conducted in June 2015. The weather has not been good these past few weeks, but we will continue to make attempts to conduct a new aerial view. Each week we put out a report on the current status of mitigating the hazardous trees in phase one, which is all the urban and roadside areas that would have human contact. We have approximately 60,000 trees currently. We expect the number to increase in the next couple weeks. We have assurance that crews are on standby and without current wild fires, they will be tasked to this program. The burning of the hazard trees has started and each tree has been mapped. Some of the information that we’re required to provide is the location of where the pile was made, date of burn, and date of burn being declared out. We plan to post flyers for the general public so they have an idea of what kind of environment they are going into.

We anticipate a busy fire season. Our concerns include fires started by lightning and persons, both accidental and intentional. When the fires are drastically close to dead trees, the smoke jumpers have to step back. It’s easy to do this when there aren’t any communities around. Our goal right now is for those responding to fires in this area can be in a situation where they are not walking in to a disaster. Our intent is to get some dependable ground out in the communities. Once a fire gets out into a sea of dead trees, I’m not willing to let anyone die to put it out. So we will leave it up to the Sheriff’s to handle the evacuations. CAL Fire and the U.S. Forest Service will be in unified command on that. Our number one goal is protect the lives of our firefighters and the public and to get people out of harm’s way.

- b. RMA (Kyria Martinez)  
Eric and I will be going to Sacramento on Monday as the Country Representatives for the Tree Mortality Task Force and we will report back on that meeting.
- c. Sequoia National Parks Service Interior  
Last year we started a five-year project in the greater Grant Grove area. We have several hundred acre treatment areas. We are about to take one project in the Hume Lake District of the monument. This is a mechanical reduction mastication project. Even though this is outside the park, this is funded by the Department of Interior and the Department of Agriculture. We realize the forest health issue is a landscape issue. It is not an agency or single landowner issue. This runs across all agencies and jurisdictions. We have an available funding source to tap into to get treatments done that make the landscape more resilient. Treatments, such as prescribed fire, reduce mortality. With some of this research we have been awarded Grant money. We are actively working with the Forest Service to cut trees.

The areas of target, camp grounds, restaurants, visitors' facilities, would be done by June 1, 2016. We have a prescribed fire plan for the Redwood Canyon area, an 800 acre prescribed fire this June. We have found that the areas of successful suppression in the Rough Fire area were mechanical treatment areas. Recognizing that we are still in a drought, we will only burn if we are in prescription. However, with this grant money, we are planning for move forward with an 800 acre prescribed burn in Redwood Canyon in the next month. We find it important to continue investing in the mechanical treatment due to its success. We could use support from the air district to get windows for these prescribed burns. We will move forward with the appropriate prescribed burns. We recognize that this goes beyond the park boundaries, but we are actively working with the Forest Service and will start working closer with CAL Fire.

**4. Assignment of Task Force Sub-Groups**

- a. Rules and Regulations: Nancy Woods and County Counsel
- b. Forest Health and Resilience Group: Brian Rueger and Margarita Gordis
- c. Prescribed Fire Group
- d. Public Outreach: Carrie Crane, Alicia Embry, and Dana Dierkes
- e. Resource Allocation: CAL Fire and Charlie Norman
- f. Utilization-Bio Energy Group: Hector Larra and Skip Barswick
- g. Utilization-Market Development Group: Robert Puls and RCD

**5. Closing Comments**

- a. (Kyria Martinez)  
The State Task Force will be informed of the Sub-Groups and the Leaders of such sub-groups. The Leaders and new attendees will be added to the mailing list.
- b. (Skip Barswick)

Member will continue to request a Pilot Program to find the best rate of power, the true cost of tree removal, and choose the most appropriate location to obtain a true sample and the most accurate results for a formal program.

c. (Kyria Martinez)

The next meeting is June 1, 2016, with a possible change to the location. All members of the Task Force will be given notice of a change of location for future meetings.