

RCRC 2014-15 WILDFIRE STRATEGY

The RCRC 2014-15 Wildfire Strategy outlines a proactive outreach effort to deliver key messages, mitigate misinformation, articulate the benefits of better forest management, and demonstrate the need for decisive action to prevent further devastation of California's forests, communities, habitat, and air and water quality due to catastrophic wildfire.

Goal

The overall goal is to communicate and demonstrate the multi-level issues associated with current forest management practices, and foster a cultural or, if needed, structural shift within the United States Forest Service (USFS) and other state and federal agencies in order to better manage California's forests and wildlands. With this plan, RCRC endeavors to ease statutory, regulatory, and legal barriers to fire-prevention project completion, and create innovative new approaches to increasing the pace and scale of vegetation management and forest restoration in California.

Audience

The intended targets of this strategy include key policy and decision makers in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. In addition to traditional advocacy efforts, RCRC staff will work to raise the level of awareness on this issue through the use of print, broadcast, and social media channels.

Objectives

The implementation of an action-oriented plan of advocacy, outreach, and communication to effect improvements in California's forest health by:

- Increasing the fire resiliency of communities in and around California's forests and wildlands;
- Protecting the watersheds and thereby the downstream water quality and long-term availability;
- Improving California's wildlife habitat by preventing the "scorched earth" scale fires that devastate the environment;
- Maintaining the carbon sequestration potential and reducing carbon emissions from California's forest lands; and,
- Fostering internal change within the USFS to remake the agency in such a way that they are able to meet their stated 500,000 acre per year goal for forest management projects within California.

Strategic Assessment

RCRC has been heavily involved in wildfire prevention and forest management issues since the inception of the organization.

As outlined in the attached 2008-Present Timeline of actions taken by RCRC Board Members and staff, many different avenues have been explored and exhausted to improve the health of California's forest lands and to mitigate the increase of catastrophic wildfire.

While successfully completing key action items, including meeting with state and federal officials, supporting core legislation on these issues at a state and federal level, and even taking on the process of negotiating a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between California's counties and the USFS and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), little change has been realized in and around the forests managed by the federal government.

There is no question that litigation, funding, and a lack of "social license" from certain stakeholders present ongoing barriers to forest management projects. However, even as many of these limitations are easing as the various interests see the value of increased forest management activities, projects continue to languish.

While traditional advocacy efforts such as supporting the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFFA) continue to have value, history and experience show that changes must also be made internally to the culture and/or structure of the USFS in order to experience large-scale improvements in the quality and quantity of forest management projects.

Strategic Elements

The intent is that the following strategic elements maximize RCRC's existing strengths and opportunities, capitalize on current and ongoing partnerships with disparate groups with similar goals, and create an infrastructure for a paradigm shift on this issue. These strategies will be implemented through a three-pronged approach, utilizing advocacy, communications, and outreach at both the state and federal levels. Each of these three components will overlap, but for ease of reading and discussion, they are broken into distinct components.

Advocacy

Advocacy encompasses a broad range of activities, including, but not limited to, taking positions on bills or regulations; engaging policy-makers to make changes to existing systems; and, rallying members and stakeholders for action. Some of the near to mid-term key advocacy components of this plan are highlighted below.

State

- Engage with policy makers, both legislators and administration officials and staff, regarding the benefits of utilizing some of the cap-and-trade revenues for forest management activities on federally-managed lands.
- Continue to advocate and communicate the need to reduce the barriers to biomass utilization, such as the cost of transport, and the need to increase confidence in availability of fuels within prospective biomass entities.
- Continue to engage on the allocation of State Responsibility Area (SRA) fee funds, to ensure that they are being utilized for key fire-prevention projects on the ground such as vegetation management and shaded fuel break work.
- Utilize county resolutions regarding forest health and fire risks to highlight the pervasiveness of the problem throughout California and to encourage the Governor and other lawmakers to more strongly push for better public lands management in California.
- Further engage the water community on the connection between forest health and water quality, quantity, and availability, possibly including large Southern

California entities such as Metropolitan Water District (MWD) in joint advocacy efforts through the California Forest Watershed Alliance (CAFWA).

Federal

- Propose and advocate for the expansion of the White House Council of Environmental Quality's (CEQ) existing authority to reduce the environmental regulatory process, known as the NEPA "alternative procedures" process, for projects post-disaster. The first level of expansion should be to utilize alternative procedures on all post-fire mitigation of disaster-level fires on federal lands. The Rim Fire was one of the few instances where CEQ has invoked alternative procedures for a wildfire, even though this authority has been utilized regularly after other types of disasters such as hurricanes and floods. The second wave of expansion should be to extend this authority to "green forests" in addition to post-fire forests. When a forest is determined to be severely at-risk for catastrophic wildfire, the expedited environmental review process should be utilized *prior* to that forest burning, rather than only after it has been destroyed.
- Propose and advocate a structural change to the organizational paradigm of the USFS. The management scheme needs to be altered such that it is similar to the way that the BLM is structured, with a State Director as the final arbiter of land management decisions within the state. One benefit to this would be faster project completion since the final decision-makers on projects on California's forests would be located in California.
- Continue to support and advocate for the WDFA or other legislation or Budget language that would create a system by which the costs of fighting disaster-level catastrophic wildfires are not borne by the lands management budgets of federal land management agencies. The response to other types of natural disasters such as flood, hurricane, and earthquake are all funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in such a way as to protect prevention and mitigation dollars.
- Continue to support and advocate on behalf of the biomass industry and the need to reduce the barriers to biomass utilization, such as the cost of transport and the need to increase confidence in availability of fuels within prospective biomass entities, through an expanded use of stewardship contracting.

Outreach

For purposes of this plan, outreach includes those individuals and entities that RCRC wants to influence and urge to action, but also those organizations or stakeholders that may be valuable and unexpected allies. RCRC already benefits from its active participation in CAFWA, and through it, a key working relationship with its member entities, including the California Forestry Association (CFA), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF), and the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), as well as an ongoing relationship with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) both in their adjunct participation in CAFWA and RCRC's participation in both SNC's Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) and Kitchen Cabinet groups.

State

- The California Air Resources Board (CARB) Chair is a key influencer over Governor Jerry Brown on climate change and air quality issues. Through Chair Nichols' participation in the recently-created multi-jurisdictional Forest Climate Action Team (FCAT), on which RCRC Regulatory Affairs Advocate Staci Heaton also sits, this is a critical time to educate her regarding the importance of forest health in preventing greenhouse gases and protecting air quality.
- The Department of Finance (DOF) staff will ultimately be the arbiters of whether or not State Cap-and-Trade funding can be spent on federal lands. Therefore, it is vital to educate them on the cost-savings and other less tangible benefits that spending up-front dollars on fire prevention can achieve.
- The Director of the Governor's Office of Planning and Research is an extremely influential member of the Governor's staff, particularly concerning environmental policy matters such as greenhouse gas mitigation and climate adaptation planning.
- The senior policy advisor to the Governor on energy and environmental issues within "the horseshoe" will be a key person to contact and educate on the statewide importance of forest management activities.
- The California Secretary of Natural Resources is a key decision-maker for this agency that encompasses both CAL FIRE and SNC, and it is critical to continue attempting to engage Secretary Laird.

Federal

- The Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at USDA oversees the USFS and a variety of other natural resource issues. He previously served as Senior Advisor to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack on the issues of the environment and climate change. Mr. Bonney is a top decision and policy maker for the USFS, and if convinced of the importance and feasibility of a proposal, could be essential to the ultimate success of that proposal.
- The Associate Director for NEPA Oversight at CEQ is a key staff member within CEQ, and an expert on the NEPA process and CEQ's alternative procedures authority. Mr. Greczmiel previously worked with RCRC during the MOA process. He would be a valuable contact both as a policy influencer and as a knowledge base to assist in avoiding pitfalls in attempting various policy changes surrounding the environmental review of projects.
- The Members of the RCRC Congressional Delegation are the front line messengers for our member counties and the advocacy message of our organization. We need their support and active engagement so they can carry our message forward among their congressional colleagues.
 - Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R)
 - Rep. Jared Huffman (D)
 - Rep. John Garamendi (D)
 - Rep. Tom McClintock (R)
 - Rep. Mike Thompson (D)
 - Rep. Doris Matsui (D)
 - Rep. Paul Cook (R)
 - Rep. Jim Costa (D)
 - Rep. Sam Farr (D)
 - Rep. David Valadao (R)
 - Rep. Devin Nunes (R)
 - Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R)
 - Rep. Juan Vargas (D)

- House Natural Resources Committee members. Current Chairman Doc Hastings is retiring. The next Chairman and Ranking Democrat will have a significant say in forestry and wildfire management issues. Rep. Rob Bishop from Utah is a likely candidate to be the next Chairman, but it is not definite. Rep. DeFazio, who is the current Ranking Democrat, is a staunch supporter of the O&C forest plan; he could leave his senior Democratic position next year, depending on other elections. Rep. DeFazio's O&C bill was incorporated into HR 1526, the Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention Act, which passed the House in September 2013.
 - Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT)
 - Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR)

- Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee members. In early 2014, when then Chairman Wyden left the Energy & Natural Resources Committee, Senator Mary Landrieu assumed the position as Chairman. Since that time, the Committee has done little on forestry issues. It is possible that there could be a new Senator chairing the Committee next year, if the Senate majority changes hands or if Senator Landrieu loses her re-election.
 - Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA)
 - Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

- Appropriations Committee members in both houses will be key points of contact regarding forestry issues, since much of the discussion of policy hinges on sufficient funding to accomplish the work. The President submitted a supplemental appropriations request of \$615 million for wildfire suppression, as well as a new discretionary cap adjustment for wildfire suppression operations starting in FY 2015. However, thus far, the House Appropriations Committee did not include any funding for this effort. In the Senate, the Committee included the \$615 million request for wildfire suppression, but the bill failed to get 60 votes to consider the bill.
 - House Appropriations Committee Members
 - Representative Hal Rogers, (R-KY), Chairman, full committee
 - Representative Nita Lowey (D-NY), Ranking Democrat, full committee
 - Representative Ken Calvert (R-CA), Chairman, Interior Subcommittee
 - Representative Jim Moran (D-VA), Ranking Democrat, Interior Subcommittee (retiring)
 - Senate Appropriations Committee
 - Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Chairman, full committee
 - Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL), Ranking Republican, full committee
 - Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), Possible Chairman, full committee
 - Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), Chairman, Interior Subcommittee
 - Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Ranking Republican, Interior Subcommittee

Communication/Media Relations

Raising the level of awareness of the multi-level issues associated with current forest management practices is imperative to successfully gaining the attention of key stakeholders and state and federal policy and decision makers. Utilizing current and historical examples, RCRC staff will employ traditional and social media efforts to highlight the extreme risk and danger that poor forest management practices pose to California's forests, communities, habitat, and air and water quality. The majority of the Communication/Media Relations effort will be focused at the state level, with a concerted effort to market media coverage to stakeholders and policy and decision makers at both the state and federal level.

- Leverage current events to garner the attention of media outlets and further our message in the public domain.
- Work with partners, stakeholders, CAFWA, and other like-minded entities representing varied interests to highlight the widespread support and need for forest management practice reform.
- Identify and utilize influential individuals to submit Opinion-Editorials to strategically selected print publications.
- Utilize opportunities to submit Letter to the Editor responses to articles and Opinion pieces discussing issues related to wildfire and emergency management and disaster response and funding.
- Maintain an active, engaging presence on social media channels.