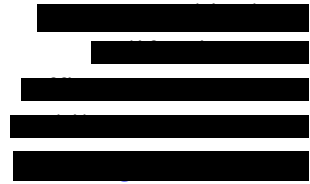


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Richard Gienger



5-7 August 2019

Comments on the draft Planning Watershed Pilot Project (PWPP) Final Report

Elliot Chasin
California Department of Fish & Wildlife
Chair of the Initial PWPP
Sacramento
California

Dear Elliot Chasin:

There is a lot of valuable information regarding a whole range of topics and processes triggered by the initial Planning Watershed Pilot Project centered on the Campbell Creek Planning Watershed in the South Fork 10 Mile River North of Fort Bragg in Mendocino County. Most of this information is in the draft Final Report and in the extensive Appendices. It ranges from details in specific THPs in the Planning Watershed, to perspectives of the watershed and region in geological and historical time, to uneven and incomplete efforts at making the progress as envisioned for this initial Pilot. I will critique the findings and recommendations, paying particular attention to the responses to the Critical Questions. Some of the main disappointments for me were falling short of the hoped for substantive incremental progress in data/information reform, credible cumulative effects evaluation/response, and facilitation of forest & watershed restoration/recovery efforts stemming from the information produced and referenced in the THP process.

I mistakenly thought that addressing the Critical Questions would result in this substantive incremental progress inline with the basic intents of the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Program from AB 1492. Instead of being able to, by addressing real logging and THP history in a real Planning Watershed (the basic ‘building block’ of impact review) to make practical progress that would inform and guide larger scale applications and agree on a doable set of reform issues (eight were recommended early on, four may have been more realistic) – things became very complicated and ‘fuzzy’ fast. The Scope of Work Subcommittee was unable to both make the necessary simplifications and get the help and interaction needed from the PWPP Working Group and adequate staffing.

Based on this initial PWPP experience, and consistent with other commenters, the next Planning Watershed Pilot Project needs to have the scope of work clearly agreed upon, with full equity participation of public stakeholders, and adequate recompense for non-

agency involved participants. I will get into this a little more later on, but solidly establishing needed forest and watershed stewardship reforms in pilots at the Planning Watershed scale are an essential step in achieving broader, realistic, and long-term quality results.

A clear understanding of Pilot goals is needed from the outset, goals that are related to objective improvements in forest and watershed stewardship based on simple clarity and utility for all stakeholders. The initial Pilot tended to get tangled up in too much energy going toward emphasizing all the wonderful management of landowners in the Planning Watershed, and there's much that is exemplary – but that is not a Pilot Goal, and neither is casting blame of one sort or another. Trying to find the right effective, consistent and simplified information base to achieve the best outcomes to improve overall practices is a Pilot Goal. For instance, many of the practices by Lyme and the Campbell predecessors regarding stream/riparian and road practices are positive examples that can be applied more broadly if other given landowners have the model, resources, and partners to take similar actions.

I am geologically partial. To my mind some of the most positive aspects of the Initial Pilot were the contributions of the California Geological Survey, notably the work of Mike Fuller – both in his presentation on the big geological picture, and in his 38 page Appendix 9: “Focused Information Review for the Smith Creek Basin”. Mike's work on reliability of various data is a key element for positive improvements moving forward. He ‘pulls no punches’ as he explores all of the available information and contexts – giving a peek at what deeper understanding and practices should include. Short of that lofty perspective, he shows practices, like applying some common sense about erosion realities that can start being applied rather quickly.

I also came into the Pilot wanting to have adequate staffing to tear into THP form reality and start establishing formats that would make sense and be consistent. For instance, determine formats that would lay the foundation for credible cumulative effect evaluation and response -- formats that would layout the opportunities for forest and watershed restoration/recovery in one section. Those actions would have to be tied to and include adequate descriptions of conditions. All this could not be easily accomplished in the first Pilot, but enough work could be done (with enough paid staff), to establish findings and recommendations pointing to the next step in the next Pilot. I sincerely thought, it was a no brainer, that the first Pilot would recommend that for the best and most pertinent cumulative impact findings for PW THPs be collected and catalogued in a single real and virtual folder for ease of access to stakeholders and be applied to future projects – only needing to be changed if events or a proposed project changed those findings.

One thing the initial Pilot did do was examine a lot of riparian, stream, and erosion conditions – not all of course. Some detailed work was only able to be done for a portion of the Smith Creek watershed, some only for the Smith Creek watershed, and a much lesser amount covering the entire Campbell Creek Planning Watershed. One thing did not even start to get done, except for Zack Jones' historical narrative at the first meeting

of the PWPP Working Group, was a description of the forest itself from so-called ‘contact’, and before, up through today. Describing and correcting current depleted conditions is at the heart of Forest restoration called for by AB 1492, and is in tandem with Watershed restoration.

Back to adequate staffing: Before the Pilot was even near to getting started, the hue and cry went out to have qualified persons, in the watershed and forestry disciplines, help to represent the public and public trust. And these persons be paid for their contributions on par with those participating for the assorted agencies. This did not happen, and was a large negative factor. For instance, the initial Pilot needed Ruth Norman and others at the very start to deal with the massive workload of detailed evaluations. I think that Ruth did not start her THP mining until May 2018. Too much to do and not enough time. Ruth pitched in hard, but time ran out. One of the problems with that I think -- realizing the value of her detailed THP examination/recording work – is that she saw a lot of her work defending the THP process and the good work of Lyme and Campbell Global. Like I said earlier, that’s all well and good, but it’s not the mission.

I am irritated by Ruth’s treatment of 14 CCR 964.4(a), that I consider to be at the heart of producing valid information for achieving watershed restoration work and goals, including descriptions of problems and mapping, as only applicable if the forester considered some particular impact on each of the watercourses (required to be walked) as “significant”. Comparing her takes on the riparian and upslope impacts claimed in many THPs are interesting side by side with the extensive work on impacts compiled by Mike Fuller. I am appreciative of the thoroughness and dedication Ruth applied. It really is an important highly detailed lesson in the realities and frustrations of THPs to reviewers and to the public – with several decades of examples.

Another late contribution which should have been integral from the start, and gets a lot of valid attention in the draft Final Report is LiDAR and its incredible usefulness in describing both watershed and forest conditions. The need for it to be integrated into the second Planning Watershed Pilot Project is both obvious and exciting.

Maybe an expert retired annuitant will jump to and put out a readable Lessons from the Initial Planning Watershed Pilot Project: Towards Credible Forest and Watershed Recovery for California.

Sincerely,

Richard Gienger
On behalf of himself, Forests Forever, and Why Forests Matter

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The Focus of the Pilot Projects

Information

- Reforming and standardizing requirements for vital information on a CalWater Planning Watershed basis.
 - Establish basic templates for mapping and other information.
 - The templates will provide basic and electronically accessible information deemed necessary by the agencies, plan submitters, and the public to understand and fulfill their legal responsibilities.

Cumulative Impacts

- Making the evaluation and response to cumulative impacts credible and effective.

Restoration Measures

- Enabling restoration measures to be identified for listed anadromous salmonids, other wildlife, watersheds, and the forest itself.

Monitoring

- Determining appropriate and effective monitoring procedures and standards.

The Requirements for the Pilot Project

Who's Involved?

- The Board and Department of Forestry, guided by the Natural Resources Agency and CalEPA, in partnership with harvest plan review agencies, the range of public stakeholders, and the scientific community shall conduct pilot projects to determine and implement processes that result in long-term efficiencies and cost savings while ensuring environmental performance that will protect and restore vital soil, water, wildlife, timber, and forest values and resources.
- The industry, agencies, and the public will have the opportunity to participate in the development and implementation of needed pilot projects in transparent processes.
- Pilot projects shall be conducted by persons and entities with relevant training and experience.
- There shall be consultation with and comment sought from appropriate scientific experts and the public, including, but not limited to, qualified fisheries and wildlife biologists, in order to develop evaluation and implementation guidelines that are feasible, enforceable, and protective of the public trust.

Where?

- Take place at the appropriate spatial scale.

Determining Baseline and Parameters

- Use reproducible, preferably quantitative, methods of evaluation as the primary means of determining baseline and/or existing physical, chemical, or biological parameters.

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Goals

- Shall include significant primary goals such as to effectively protect, maintain, and contribute to the restoration of properly functioning habitats for recovery of listed species, restoration of quality timberlands, or other goals deemed appropriate under Section 4564. Some of these may include reducing the risk of wildfire with special consideration for human communities, reducing sedimentation and soil loss, achieving long-term carbon sequestration in on-site tree growth and other on-site forest carbon pools, and protecting–restoring unique attributes of a given planning watershed.

Reports and Policies

- Use information in the State of Washington's Watershed Analysis Manual, the Methods Manual developed by the State of California's North Coast Watershed Assessment Program, the California Coho Recovery Strategy, the NOAA Fisheries' Recovery Plans for California ESUs, the California State Wildlife Action Plan, and from other pertinent reports, programs, and guidance documents
- Shall be consistent with state and federal mandates governing coho recovery and restoration of impaired water bodies. Pilot projects shall also reflect the established joint policies between the board and the department and the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

The Results of Pilot Projects

- Document the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Guidelines for Cumulative Effects

- The pilot projects shall include the development of guidelines for conducting a cumulative effects evaluation on a planning watershed scale, and shall address the potential project-specific planning watershed cumulative effects of timber harvesting activities.

Public Hearings re Findings and Recommendations

- The findings and recommendations of pilot projects shall be presented in at least one public hearing, or more, depending on the scope and spacial extent of those findings and recommendations. The initial hearing will be before the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, with all pilot project involved agencies required to be present.

Rulemaking

- Any recommended rule making shall have the goal of meeting the needs of each of the agencies and the public and private stakeholders – and meet the criteria of creating efficiencies and ensuring environmental performance. The rulemaking will likely done primarily by the Board of Forestry, but the other involved agencies and departments my need to act to make sure their regulations are consistent with the findings and recommendations of any pilot project.

Information (Organizing, Access, etc.)

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- All documents that form the basis for the pilot projects that are developed pursuant to this section shall be posted on the department's Internet Web site.
- The board, with the assistance of a multidisciplinary technical advisory committee, and in consultation with the Natural Resources Agency, CalEPA, and others, develop recommendations and pass regulations for providing electronic public access to all relevant documents that assist the department in administering timber harvest regulations, in the protection and recovery of forest and watershed health and productivity, and in monitoring. Watershed specific information shall be organized by CalWater Planning Watersheds which may then be conglomerated into larger aggregations as appropriate.

The Future

- It is intended that pilot projects will be used in the future as needed to improve forest practices, recovery measures, and the quality of California's forestland, watershed, and wildlife resources; and the human communities that depend upon them.

Timeline

- It is intended that the first pilot project, or set of pilot projects, be completed by 1 January 2017 or sooner.
- It is intended that rules and process changes resulting from these initial pilot projects be in place by 1 January 2018 or sooner.

Funding

- Funding and personnel for the development and implementation of pilot projects shall be utilized from existing department and responsible agencies' budgets and personnel, including first priority funding from AB 1492 for timber plan review agencies. Additional funding shall be sought from private and public sources, statewide and nationally, with an emphasis on receiving support from educational institutions.