Ventura River Watershed Council Meeting

**Thursday, November 21, 2019**

9:00 am – 11:30 pm

555 Mahoney Avenue

Oak View, CA 93022

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**Meeting Minutes**

*Meeting facilitated by Jamie Whiteford and Andy Spyrka (VCRCD)*

9:02-9:03

**Andy (Ventura RCD)**

Alright, Good morning everyone, I’m Andy I’m the Ventura Watershed Council Manager

9:04-9:05

**Andy (Ventura RCD)**

Thanks for taking the time to join today. Looks like we can get started, Some will probably file in shortly

**Andy (Ventura RCD)**

That being said, I’m going to call this meeting to order, you see the agenda on the screen. We have a wildfire centered discussion today followed by an update from Executive leadership of Ventura River InStream Flow.

**Andy (Ventura RCD)**

Moving forward I am looking for someone to adopt the meeting minutes. Any motions to adopt the meeting minutes.

9:06-9:07

**Andy (Ventura RCD)**

I’m Sorry Mike you broke up, all I heard was so moved

**Mike Sulivan**

So moved, I said I’m so moved

**Andy (Ventura RCD)**

Okay Thank you Mike I appreciate that. Can I have a second?

9:08-9:09

**Luis Lampara**

Second- Luis Lampara Ventura County Colab

9:10-9:19

General Introductions and updates

* **Andy (Ventura RCD)-** We have wildfire funding through December 31st so please reach out if you were impacted and were looking for proposals for monarch overwintering sites

9:19

**Andy (Ventura RCD)**

Next up we have Bryant Baker who will be discussing wildfire ecology on behalf of the los padres forest watch. So thank you and I will let you take over the screen.

9:20-9:21

**Bryant Baker**

I’m Bryant Baker I’m the conservation director at the Los Padres Forest Watch. We’re based in Santa Barbara County but we also work in Ventura County because that’s where the Los Padres Forest is. I’ve done a lot of photo documentation of regrowth after the fire in the watersheds. I’m going to talk about wildfire ecology specific to the Ventura River Watershed but it can apply anywhere on the south central coast.

9:21-9:25

**Bryant Baker**

Looking at the ecology of the watershed we mostly have Chaparral and Coastal Sage Scrub.

**Bryant Baker**

Chapparal is the most widespread ecosystem. It is a low and short ecosystem. They’re quite adapted to the dry areas in our region and are very fire adapted.

**Bryant Baker**

Coastal sage scrub is shorter subshrubs- very drought tolerant. You tend to find it in dryer areas, like south facing slopes

**Bryant Baker**

Oak Woodland- you’ll see it in areas with more moisture. Mainly oak, bay laurel or madrone with a nice understory of sometimes poison oak.

**Bryant Baker**

Hardwood forest- in Southern California you’ll see it along streams. Mainly deciduous

**Bryant Baker**

Bigcone Douglas Fir- the conifers you usually find along north facing slopes and canyons

**9:25-9:27**

**Bryant Baker**

In chaparral what we normally experience is large intense fire every 30-150 years but we are experiencing these fires at much shorter intervals like 10-15 years. We are dealing with a fire frequency problem.

The intense interval is variable in the forest.

**Bryant Baker**

We know this because of decades of studies

**9:27-9:31**

**Bryant Baker**

If you look at fire data for our region: when I look back at the last 7 years of data I see we have a distinct season that starts in May and goes to November or December. We have a peak in July. More acreage on average burns in the fall. That is because of the Santa Ana Winds and he more dryer conditions in the fall.

**Bryant Baker**

When a fire burns it leave a barren landscape. If the fire doesn’t burn hot enough in Chapparal you wont get any seed germination.

**Bryant Baker**

It’s important to understand how plants cope with fire. How do plants burn and how they repopulate after.

9:31-9:35

**Bryant Baker**

Obligate Seeders- They only repopulate by coming up through the dormant seed bank. Usually, the seeds need high heat or a fire cue to germinate, they often germinate in full-force. These are the species you can lose after a fire because they need enough time to mature, reproduce and seed the seed bank.

Ceanothus, Manzanitas, Deer weed are obligate seeders.

9:35-9:38

**Bryant Baker**

Obligate Resprouters- Immature plants are killed but mature plants will resprout. These need time to restore their carbohydrate storage and pull carbon back in. We call it top killing.

They have burls- masses at the base or growing pods. There’s usually a lot of adventitious growing buds at the bottom of the plant. You’ll see it in Chamise or Toyon.

Oaks have this in their branches. They’re an example of Epicormic sprouting and within a couple of years it’ll have it’s full canopy back.

9:39- 9:41

**Bryant Baker**

Facultative Seeders- will usually resprout from the base and have a dormant seed bank that are enhanced by fire cues. An example is Chamise, Ceanothus and Manzanita.

9:41-9:45

**Bryant Baker**

Fire Followers- have a dormant seed bank. The difference is you wont see Fire Followers in a mature stand of Manzanita after a burn. They are generally short lived, kind of ephemeral (2-5 years). In the meantime, they’ve been reseeding the seed bank.

An example is the fire poppy, phacelia spp., whispering bells, poodle dog bush.

**9:45-9:47**

**Bryant Baker**

They are important to establish early ground cover to intercept water and erosive force from rain drops falling. And providing food for pollinators in turn attracting birds in turn attracting bobcats and other predators.

9:47-9:49

**Bryant Baker**

Offsite seeders- repopulate when seed comes in from unburned areas offsite or if there’s survivors.

An example is Great Basin Sagebrush. We have a pocket of it in the Los Padres National Forest.

9:49-9:53

**Bryant Baker**

Deerweed is so vital because it is a Nitrogen fixer. They have these root nodes that host this bacteria and the bacteria converts nitrogen in the atmosphere to ammonia that the plant can use. These plants have this great relationship with bacteria and when they die and the nitrogen that’s in the bioavailable form gets recycled back in the soil.

Lupines, Ceanothus and Mountain Mahogany have this capability.

**9:53-9:55**

**-showed pictures post Thomas Fire**

**9:55-9:56**

**Bryant Baker**

In the fall you’ll see dead orange or brown. This is completely normal, its mainly deerweed and morning glory dormant on the ground

9:56-9:57

**Bryant Baker**

For further reading you can visit LPFE.org/fireside

**Andy (Ventura RCD)**

Great Photos I need to get out there and hike after seeing those. Now we’ll have some time for Q and A

9:57 -10:00

Q and A

**Andy (Ventura RCD)**

Alright we’ll be moving forward, next up we got Johnathon Schwartz from the Los Padres National Forest. With the BAER Program doing post wildfire assessments.

10:00-10:01

**Johnathon Schwartz**

Thank you I will share my screen. I am the minerals and geology program manager for the Los Padres National Forest and the BAER coordinator.

10:01-10:03

**Johnathon Schwartz**

My first slide represents all the programs we have. The Suppression repair, BAER Program, and Long-term Restoration.

10:03-10:05

**Johnathon Schwartz**

BAER stands for Burned Area Emergency Respond, Its designs to identify post fire threats to human life and safety and critical resources on federal land.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

Towards the end of the wildfire there’s a team of scientists that come together to write a report to recommend actions that present a risk to property and damage to resources.

10:05-10:07

**Johnathon Schwartz**

The recommendations include actions to stabilize and prevent degradation to Natural and Cultural resources and to minimize threats to life and/or property resulting from the effects of post-wildfire events and rainstorms. So this program funds and takes care of post fire issues but it focuses on how the burned landscape is going to respond.

10:07-10:010

**Johnathon Schwartz**

Some of these Specialist include a Hydrologist and Soils scientist, and others, depending on the post fire conditions.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

The amount of people on a team can fluctuate, all depending on the size and complexity of the fire.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

Each of these disciplines write their own report.

**10:10-10:14**

**Johnathon Schwartz**

The process includes: 1 Identify Critical Values at Risk, 2. Assess for Threats, 3. Evaluate risk, 4. Develop response strategy 5. Implement the strategy

**Johnathon Schwartz**

We are basically working around the clock. The final report is due 7 days after the fire containment.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

The whole idea is to implement these mitigations before the rainstorms come in.

**10:14-10:15**

**Johnathon Schwartz**

This program will fund the monitoring and removal of invasive plants after the fire as Bryant mentioned.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

We work closely with lands outside of USFS or Federal Lands to give recommendations, but its outside of our jurisdiction. In our areas of assessment, we will mention them in our report but we won’t go very into detail at all. We work closely with NRCS, USGS, emergency respond agencies and so on.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

Some of the threats exist 3, 4, 5 years after the fires until we have full revegetation of these landscapes. In these cases we would still work closely with these agencies.

**10:15-10:16**

**Johnathon Schwartz**

Some of the Geological Hazards we have are associated with Dry Rocks.

Rock flow Impacting roads again here.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

Either the initiation of landslides or re -initiation of dormant landslides.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

We follow debris flows very closely.

**10:16-10:18**

**Johnathon Schwartz**

I’ll give you pictures to take you through my personal experience of the Thomas Fire.

I spent a few hours on my office in Ojai and there was no reason for me to stay here.

Here is a picture of me heading out through downtown Ojai. Highway 150 down to Santa Paula was closed along with Highway 33.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

Eventually I made my way to the Ventura fairgrounds and started my BAER Assessment of the Fire. Here I started this the following day. We had already a forecast of rain so we needed to do a fast BAER Assessment for the Valley of Ojai for the high concerns.

10:18-10:20

**Johnathon Schwartz**

One of the first things we do is see the soil burn severity. We get a satellite imagery of this landscape that has a representation of soil burned severity. Even though Chaparral tends to burn all the way to the ground and leaves a moonscape, it creates as moderate burned severity. The physical and biological changes to the soil is what we’re looking for.

10:20-10:21

**Johnathon Schwartz**

We’re looking closely at the soil burned severity and slopes. USGS sends us back a Debris Flow Probability map. The second product we get from them is the predicted volume, and how many cubic meters. The third product is the combined hazard. Most of these are predicted in basins.

**10:21-10:25**

**Johnathon Schwartz**

During this very fast assessment we looked at different sites for potential risks.

**Showed pictures of sites**

**Johnathon Schwartz**

We do part of our assessment in helicopter. Here you can see the sulfur mountain ridgeline. These groves behaved as buffers. Flying over the Nordoff ridge I am looking at all the loose materials. Highway 33 has a lot of large boulders that has potential for remobilization. Wheeler George, assessing some of the higher properties there. This is Shelf road, Senior Creek, again looking down into the creek itself I observe all of the large materials.

10:25-10:27

**Johnathon Schwartz**

Every evening we come back to the BAER den to put together data and make our report.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

At the end we have close out meeting and presentations.

10:27-10:28

**Johnathon Schwartz**

And this map is probably what you’re familiar with seeing. This is the whole debris flow area.

**Johnathon Schwartz**

And That is all I have here

**Andy(RCD)**

Thank you I appreciate you taking the time here. Very interesting, I’m sure flying around the helicopters much be real fun.

10:28-10:29

**Q and A**

10:29-10:30

**Andy(RCD)**

We will move on. We have Christopher here from the Ojai Fire Safe Council.

10:30-10:35

**Christopher Danch**

Alright I’m Christopher Danch I’m the Executive Director for the Ojai Fire Safe Council

**Christopher Danch**

We have been serving the area for 20 years. We have managed 26 Federal Grants. But it’s been done pretty quietly.

**Christopher Danch**

We have some new challenge coming our way, we are moving towards longer fire seasons.

**Christopher Danch**

Our level of Community preparedness must improve.

**Christopher Danch**

We have a new initiative to develop a holistic, community-based, community- driven wildfire risk mitigation strategy for the ojai valley area.

**10:35-10:38**

**Christopher Danch**

Once I took the position, we prepared to develop a road map, a planning guidance document for the larger strategy.

**Christopher Danch**

The first thing we recognize is that there are existing limitations with the previous plans. The 2018 Unit Strategic Plan and the 2010 Ventura County CWPP. Its very fire agency focused and generally contains the 3 essential elements, most of it goes to the vegetation management and hazard analysis.

They don’t have the holistic perception of all the needs we want to protect.

**10:38-10:40**

**Christopher Danch**

Theres a small percentage of fires that are uncontrollable, and they do almost all the damage.

**Christopher Danch**

We want to buil whole community capacities and become a fire adapted community.

**Christopher Danch**

That means we have to learn to live in its environment, we want to be more resilient oerall, we have to learn to coexist in our environment.

**10:40-10:41**

**Christopher Danch**

The road map went through many different things. The Road map will be posted on our website

**10:41-10:43**

**Christopher Danch**

We brought in a vast risk reduction building material

**Christopher Danch**

There are a number of concerns in our working groups such as limited evacuation routes. And temporary refuge areas.

**10:43-10:45**

**Christopher Danch**

Now we are finalizing the road map and revitalizing the website to fit our needs. Our website is old and tired

**Christopher Danch**

We’ve identified a number of priority projects; I’ll give you an idea on how we’re approaching this.

**10:45-10:50**

**Christopher Danch**

One is a fine-scale risk mapping program. We are waiting to do it in collaboration with Ventura County.

Transit assessment, we had a failure of critical water infrastructure during the Thomas fire, so we need to look at that. We are also a part of a working group with a project called RAP.

I just want to say that our service are includes the bulk of the Ventura river watershed and roughly corresponds to the Ojai Valley. So that’s our planning area.

**10:50-10:51**

**Christopher Danch**

Another priority project is the Ojai Valley Prescribed grazing program.

**10:51-10:52**

**Christopher Danch**

It deals with vegetation management primarily suing goats and sheep.

**10:52-10:54**

**Christopher Danch**

We’re looking to drop animals one place and pick them up in another. The area has a large WUI area involved.

We are very excited about this program and we have already started it.

It has other ecological benefits. Increased carbon sequestration with has increased water retention which increases vegetation wetness.

**Christopher Danch**

We are beginning to put together our fundraising campaign. And our community support will make sure we hit all the areas we need in this program.

**10:54-10:56**

**Christopher Danch**

This holistic funding takes a specific baseline funding to help us. We need this to support the ongoing work necessary for these programs. These fires have brought on a floor of applicants. We had some hope from Measure C here in Ojai that would increase the transient tax. Another opportunity is to produce a small parcel tax. It did pass by a large majority and went into effect June this year.

**10:56-10:59**

**Christopher Danch**

One approach is though green bonds. They want them to create greater community resilience. Fire safe councils community level to bond-worthy projects is a funding gap.

**11:00-11:03**

**Christopher Danch**

Obviously there’s more to talk about but I’m open to questions at this time

**Andy(RCD)**

Alright we’ll take any questions now.

11:03-11:05

Q and A

**Andy(RCD)**

Okay we’ll move on, who’s sharing their screen for the executive team here.

**11:05-11:06**

**Jamie (RCD)**

It’s me

**Jamie (RCD)**

Hello Everyone I am Jamie the District scientist at the Ventura County Resource Conservation District. I will be presenting about the Ventura Watershed Flow Enhancement & Watershed Resiliency Regional Framework Project (VRIF).

11:06-11:09

**Jamie (RCD)**

For a quick summery on this project the purpose of VRIF is to

1. Create a framework
2. Shepard plans through planning
3. Assess info that comes about from planning
4. We want to pursue outreach and education to build community understanding

We want to talk subcommittees with watershed action toolkits to

11:09-11:15

**Jamie (RCD)**

So I am going to give an update on our progress

With education and outreach flip labs will run workshops for watershed consumers whom may feel marginalized

For community and workshop values they have worked on developing community and social games

**Jamie (RCD)**

Eagle Aerial uses satellite imagery to determine where to focus our attention to. They are working to develop a water consumption interface called Waterview

We want to talk subcommittees with watershed action toolkits to

**Jamie (RCD)**

Hicks Law informs the executive team, provides water right guidance, and encourages voluntary agreements for VRIF Planning project

11:20-11:25

**Jamie (RCD)**

For the framework the process starts with partners and farmers.

We like to enlist members into assessing tools that are in the tool kit.

**Jamie (RCD)**

We do this by helping to define other actions of tools and providing feedback to expand those conditions

An example of this is our Aroundo Donax removal

**Jamie (RCD)**

With that I yield my time and thank you for listening.

**Andy (RCD)**

Thank you Jamie

**Regina**

The action toolkit has all of these benefits, Fire resilience is at the core because it has all of these other benefits.

**Tom Hicks**

the legal role is not representing parties in litigation, my job is to give landowners credit for their actions

**Regina**

VRIF is a tool that leverages what has already been worked on

**Jamie (RCD)**

It is an integrative regional water management

11:50-11:51

**Andy (RCD)**

Alright I will open it up to general questions

11:52-11:53

**Lynn Rodriguez**

The Watershed Coalition Meeting updates will bring back topics to the full group

11:53- Meeting adjourned