

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS COUNTY OF TUOLUMNE

David Goldemberg, *First District*
Kathleen Haff, *Fourth District*

Ryan Campbell, *Second District*

Anaiah Kirk, *Third District*
Jaron Brandon, *Fifth District*

MINUTES

Natural Resource Committee – SPECIAL Meeting

February 2, 2022 @ 10:00 a.m.

Board of Supervisors Chambers - 2 South Green Street, Sonora

1. Call the meeting to order: Meeting called to order by Supervisor Kirk at 10:10 am. (quorum reached).
 - A. In attendance:
 - i. Committee members present (quorum met)
 1. Jim Maddox (Committee Member) Fish & Game Preservation Fund Advisory(absent)
 2. Jim Phelan (Committee Member) Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District
 3. Dick Gaiser (Committee Member) Agricultural Advisory Committee
 4. Supervisor Kirk (Committee Member)
 5. Supervisor Haff (Committee Member)
 - ii. Staff Present
 1. Dore Bietz (CAO Staff)
 2. Tracey McKnight (CAO Staff)
 - iii. Partners
 - iv. Public
2. Public Comment:
 - A. No public comment
3. Consideration of approving the minutes of the meeting held on January 10, 2022.
 - A. Supervisor Haff moved to approve with correction #7. Jim Phelan moved to seconded. All in favor. Motion passed
4. Partner Agencies
 - A. USFS Announced that they have a new Public Affairs Officer Ben Cossel came to us from BLM, he lives in Calaveras County and will be participating and getting to know Tuolumne County.
5. Committee Business
 - A. Staff Reports and recommendations:
 - i. Committee member make-up discussion. Supervisor Kirk offered to hold off until Board workshop. Committee members expressed concern Contractual concerns. Run by county counsel then will put on agenda it for next meeting.
 - B. Committee member reports:
 - i. Supervisor Kirk updated Board resolution to NaCO and conversations that he has had

with National office.

6. Discussion items

- A. USFA Fire Ignition Plan for Stanislaus National Forest– John Buckley explained his question is there a higher elevation. Beth Martinez stated that there is not a local policy at lower mid-level fire starts. Looking at values of risk and what resources we have for initial attack. Forests do compete with resources and depending on Level of Preparedness (5 is highest) that considers what the local forest is doing on decision making as it relates to fire starts. Looking at location, values at risk. At higher elevations, there is greater flexibility, but process is the same.
- i. Public comment
 1. John Buckley wanted to emphasize that there is a misconception about past Toya be Forest Fire that had to compete against other fires where communities were at risk, forest decided not to send firefighters out into a forest because
 - ii. Supervisor Kirk thanked Beth and USFS for attending, asked if there is a policy to forward to staff who can then send out to committee members. Supervisor Kirk also is there an opportunity for communities to be engaged in developing future policy? At the high level, request that memo issued by National is permanent until a rulemaking process be in place where communities can be involved at the local level. Have we as a community ever been at the table to be a part of the decision making on how fires are managed. Were we brought to the table at the beginning? Wants to start with the policy to review and has the county ever been at the table and how can we make that a part of the process at a higher level.
 - iii. Beth USFS responded. Whether there has been national or local policy engaging local governments she cannot say. Generally local policies get written in handbooks that would lay some of this out at a national level. She would not characterize the letter from Chief Moore as an indication of changing policy mid-year. Forest Supervisors do have the discretion to change policy based on needs. What Chief Moore did this past year, recognize early on that as an agency we were stripped of resources and staff being available earlier than ever. We reached Level 5 earliest ever. The letter allowed for local discretion to play a role that would not have been. There were not adequate resources to put out every fire at ignition or earliest start. The letter allowed flexibility when conditions were extreme. It was a strategic move for Chief Moore to issue those letters. It was not a change in policy but due to conditions it was necessary. Once initial attack happens, it is too late to have conversations on values of risk.
 - iv. Supervisor Kirk agree on what was said. He is trying to understand policy and if counties have ever been a part of developing the plan. Supervisor Kirk wants the local forest to engage the local agencies in developing the policy of a federal agency. Allowing county and public to have an input into what is happening at a local level. Local governments should have a final say.
 - v. Staffed asked clarifying question about current process for local governments to be engaged. Beth replied that there are opportunities depending on the level, policy or regulations. Ben stated that it is incumbent of the local government to be involved and voice concerns. Local Governments should pay attention to the federal register notices.
 1. Public Comment
 - a. John Buckley wanted to again clarify that there is no policy to manage wildfire ignitions at mid or lower level elevations. There is no rule being made so no changes proposed as the policy does not exist. The county does not have expertise in forest management in order to express or tell local forest how to manage. Why does the county want a role in the rulemaking in something that does not exist?
 - vi. Supervisor Kirk closed with his desire to continue to research and move this forward.
 - vii. USFS new Wildfire Crisis Strategy – Beth discussed high level summary of the 25-page document. Congressional funding support has never been there to this magnitude. Some of the recent bills passed by congress is encouraging. The goal is to treat an additional 20

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million acres of forest lands. As you read through the document a term used fireshed? Is used the management unit it defines. The Stanislaus is in the top 5 nationally of priorities firesheds. The SERAL project is a subset of the fireshed for the Stanislaus. Lots of eyes nationally looking at SERAL as an example of treatments they are looking for. Through our collaborations and partnerships with YSS, County and others, additional funding has come to Stanislaus. Supervisor Kirk asked if there will be an expedited process for NEPA for these projects? Beth explained we do have new tools under NEPA regs. Some small steps and progress towards making NEPA process timelier. Emergency determination process is happening, and it is being used proactively to shorten timelines. SERAL is a good example of how agencies do not have resources to get a project done and has been incredibly helpful to contract that out through MSA and other partners. Some additional fire positions are being created to increase capacity as well in order to get this strategic plan moving forward. Supervisor Kirk asked about SERAL project...how long has process taken? Two years approximately. With the research and current metrics like LIDAR (GIS mapping) seems like a long time, two years is quick and will help lay the foundation for future projects and others to use. Supervisor Kirk spoke about going through the document confronting the Wildfire Crisis.... huge change where we are headed. Document talks about community partnerships but lack any inclusion of local agencies or local counties having a role.

1. Public Comment

- a. John Buckley agreed we are not going to share in opinion, but that the streamlined process, specific to SERAL large landscape project is a great example of work that is occurring and can continue but it has taken a lot to get here.

2. Committee members

- a. Jim Phelan concurred with the amount of time it has taken to get SERAL projects to this point.
- b. Dick Gaiser agreed that while we cannot go back, we need to be more educated and informed, so we do not make same mistakes.

B. Committee Goals

- i. Staff presented discussion of committee setting goals for 2022.
- ii. Supervisor Kirk stated NR will stay. Suggested that we think about it send ideas to staff

7. Meeting Adjourned at 11:31 am.