

# Sierra National Forest Dinkey Project Planning Forum

March 2009 – September 2009

**Location:** Clovis, California

## **Background:**

National Forests in the Sierra Nevadas face continuing controversies over the effects of timber harvest on old-growth forests and their wildlife, such as the California spotted owl and the Pacific fisher. To determine whether forested ecosystems can be managed to maintain essential components and still support a variety of uses, the Sierra National Forest teamed up with the Pacific Southwest Research Station in a proposed adaptive management study, The Kings River Project. Since the project was initially proposed, it has faced numerous administrative and legal challenges from conservation groups, which have raised concerns regarding the project's scale and reach, and its potential impacts on sensitive wildlife species.

With the help of the U.S. Institute, the Dinkey Project Planning Forum convened to develop a project in the Dinkey North and South areas of the Sierra National Forest as a sub-set of the Kings River Project. The planning forum included representatives from all stakeholder interests, including forest industry, conservation, wildlife, fire safety, and adjacent landowners. The forum's overall goal was to design and implement vegetative treatments to restore a healthy forest structure and reduce fire-risk, while supporting ecosystem functions and addressing stakeholder interests.

## **Results and Accomplishments**

- Through joint fact finding, parties were able to agree on fundamental science issues, providing a sound framework for decision making.
- The forum reached agreement on a proposed action and its implementation. The proposal emphasizes heterogeneity, while implementation focuses on public and fire fighter safety, management of Pacific fisher and spotted owl habitat, and restoration of forest structure and fire resiliency.
- A broad range of participants helped bring needed expertise and unique problem-solving abilities. Participants were committed to thinking differently and working together to achieve agreement.



## **Highlights and Innovations**

- Independent science was a key to the success of the planning forum. A paper published by the Pacific Southwest Research Station encouraged new discussions about ecosystem management. The lead author participated in the meetings and his credibility and independence helped guide the debate on issues related to heterogeneity.
- Scientific experts were approved by the planning forum and participated in meetings, and thus were available throughout the process to assist the negotiations. Site visits with experts also helped achieve the success of the planning forum.
- Many participants, e.g., representatives from environmental groups, brought strong technical competence and thus were able to review the science information provided by the Forest Service.
- Facilitation by a third-party neutral helped create trust, normalize the conflict, and develop an environment conducive to problem-solving.

## **Credits**

### **Partner from National Roster of ECR Practitioners**

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