

Forest official answers our questions

The Mendocino Voice emailed questions to Edith Hannigan, Executive Officer, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire), and Emily Smith, Deputy Chief, Acting Forest Manager, providing direct supervision to Jackson Demonstration State Forest (JDSF) staff. Smith provided the following answers.

Frank Hartzell for Mendocino Voice: How can the scope of work and the eventual early management plan be composed when the Tribal Advisory Council works confidentially and the Jackson Demonstration State Forest Advisory Group (JAG) is a public body?

Smith: Tribal input has always been handled confidentially to provide a platform for tribal governments to speak with land managers without fear of releasing sensitive information to the public. The goal is to promote open and free exchange of information to protect tribal trust resources. It is one of the few resources that is kept confidential from the public.

Hartzell: As far as I understand, tribes should have co-management of THPs. What if they don't like the New Vision or carbon mandates or you or Mendocino Unit Chief Gunn doesn't like something tribes demand or it doesn't fit state law?

Smith: We are providing tribes a platform for early input on THPs at the time we start to develop them. This is when it is just a loose set of objectives and a general area of the landscape lacking clear boundaries. We then provide an additional opportunity once the project is more developed, but before going to the JAG and to permitting. Both these provide opportunities for tribes to shape the project at early stages. A parallel process is also happening where we are discussing projects with tribes that meet their needs. These may or may not require a THP to implement.

Hartzell: Is it fair to characterize the New Vision as a partial reaction to local input during protests, partially a result of the governor's orders on co-management and climate change or something else?

Smith: Just as our climate and ecological trends are changing, so must our management of this critical natural resource. Based on feedback from a wide array of community members, scientists, environmental groups, and local tribal leaders, the state has outlined a new blueprint for managing the JDSF that balances the requirements of state law with current state climate goals, opportunities for tribal co-management, and restoration economies.

Hartzell: Edith, you stepped in twice at the JAG meeting. What is your official role with the JAG? You succeeded in getting Teresa Morales to finally sit down, but it seems like that should be the role of Smith, Gunn and Hollister?

Smith: The JAG is advisory to both Cal Fire and the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board). Edith is the Executive Officer of the Board. The Board advises Cal Fire and the JAG on Bagley Keene and public meeting management which they have more experience and expertise in.

Hartzell: Edith also joined the discussion when board member Amy Wynn suggested edits and crossed out the second half of her suggestion that cited local community values as being part of the process. Could you explain what you did there and what the intent was? The consensus here among a variety of viewpoints is the Board of Forestry defanged the JAG after it was formed because of a concern that it was going too far into local control when the forest is a statewide resource. Can you help me with this characterization?

Smith: JDSF has both local, regional, and statewide significance. The JAG also reflects that diversity with members representative of both perspectives.

Hartzell: How many THP's are in the pipeline for Jackson?

Smith: Jackson historically requires three to five THPs per year to keep up with the necessary sustainable forest management, research, demonstration, and recreational improvements.

Currently proposed THPs to implement the new vision include:

- a. The Camp One Timber Harvest Plan (THP) is focused on fish habitat restoration and wildfire resilience for our recreation infrastructure.
- b. The Pyro-Silviculture THP is advancing our knowledge of bringing beneficial fire back into redwood forest management.
- c. The Adaptive Management Experiment (AMEX) will study redwood ecosystem persistence in the face of disturbances exacerbated by climate change.

Hartzell: Another point I'm confused about is EIRs and CEQA. Is there in fact an exemption for those for THPs? And if so, where do I find reference to that exemption? How will this be handled going forward?

Smith: THPs are functionally equivalent to a CEQA EIR. Exemptions to THPS are found in the forest practice rules, generally in 14 CCR § 1038. The only proposed exemption we are currently looking at is the Road 510 shaded fuel break which would use the Forest Fire Prevention Exemption. This is delayed as it was selected as a site for a carbon flux tower that will need a few years to calibrate and collect baseline information before active forest management will be proposed within its footprint.

Hartzell: Do you have a response to the notion that the THPs are premature because the Scope of Work hasn't been done?

Smith: JDSF has a valid management plan and a New Vision document that outlines important items we expect to be incorporated into future management plan revisions. Board of Forestry policy 0351.10 is clear that forest management is to continue during forest management plan review process.

- a. Policy 0351.10: Management Plans for Boggs Mountain, Jackson, Latour, Mountain Home and Soquel Demonstration State Forests shall be prepared by CAL FIRE, with appropriate public review, for approval by the Board. CAL FIRE shall present to the Board a thorough review of each existing management plan at least every ten years. After each review, the Board may direct the Department either to continue management under the existing management plan, to prepare amendments to the management plan, or to prepare a new management plan for public review and Board review and approval. CAL FIRE shall submit the revised or newly prepared plan to the Board within a reasonable timeframe as identified by the Board. CAL FIRE shall continue management of the state forests under existing plans, with appropriate consideration for changes in law or regulation, until amendments or new plans are approved by the Board.

Hartzell: Are there more THPs coming forward at the February meeting? I gather there will be public discussion of the site we toured and a probable vote.

Smith: A vote on the Pyro-Silviculture THP is expected based on the review process defined by the JAG (included in the November meeting materials). We will have a presentation by Dr. Sarah Bisbing, University of Nevada, Reno, and a field tour of the Adaptive Management Experiment. This is a recently funded study that will be implemented through an upcoming THP.

Hartzell: The Camp One THP would go out to bid in 2025 and start cutting in that year if all goes to plan? Will the JAG see that one again before harvest?

Smith: The plan was to operate the Camp One THP during the 2025 field season. Because the JAG did not reach consensus on its approval, it will be forwarded to the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection and Cal Fire for final decision per the JAG charter. A timeline will be unknown until this process is complete. The JAG can at any time request to discuss a particular project within its agenda or to schedule a field visit. There is nothing scheduled at this time. Another public field tour will be held after THP approval and before timber sale contracting. This was being planned for the fall of 2024.