

**Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
Range Management Advisory Committee (RMAC)
Vegetation Management/Fire Focus Group**

**Minutes
January 4, 2005**

Attending:

Representing

Ken Zimmerman	RMAC Chairman
Mike Connor	Public Member
Clancy Dutra	California Farm Bureau
J.R. McCollister	Public Member
Leonard Hale	Watershed Fire Council of Southern California
Henry Giacomini	California Farm Bureau
Chuck Pritchard	Resource Conservation Districts
Mel Thompson	California Wool Growers Association
Jeff Stephens	CDF / RMAC Executive Secretary
Ken Nehoda	CDF Vegetation Management
Tony Mediatì	CDF Vegetation Management

Call to Order and Introductions:

Items 1, 2, and 3 of the agenda: J.R. McCollister called the meeting to order January 4, 2005 at 1:15 P.M. He then asked for a review of the minutes and made several changes that were noted for correction by Jeff Stephens. Approval of the minutes was deferred for the full committee meeting on January 5, 2005.

Item 4 Review of the CDF Vegetation Management Program (VMP):

Jeff Stephens was asked to contact Bruce Oulrey with CARB and ask if he followed up on information requested by RMAC on a comparison of emissions from controlled burns versus wildfire. The contact will be made.

Jeff Stephens was asked to provide a summary of the VMP Programmatic EIR. He stated that the PEIR has not been acted upon to any large extent due to other assigned duties. The most recent meetings did secure the assistance of FRAP staff that are key to completion of the document. These staff may be available to begin working on the document in March of 2005. J.R. McCollister asked if dates have been set for completion of tasks. Mr. Stephens stated that a date for completion of a notice of intent was scheduled for January 7, 2005 but that date will not be met.

The discussion then turned to VMP in general. Leonard Hale made the observation that regulatory relief is needed on some issues, particularly with regard to air

quality. J.R. McCollister responded stating that air quality constraints are an excuse used by some Units to not burn. The number of burn days may not be limiting, rather other issues come into play. Chuck Pritchard stated that in his conversations with Fred Frank (retired CDF) he noted that there is a small window during which burning can occur, but this can be expanded with pretreatment of vegetation with additional funding to pay for the pretreatment. J.R. McCollister noted that mixing programs (VMP plus CFIP) can be useful for expanding burn capability.

Ken Zimmerman made reference to the "10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan," developed by the Clinton Administration in cooperation with the Governors. CDF is signatory to this plan which ties funding for vegetation management to performance measured in acres treated. He further stated that conflict exists if CDF (the State) is not willing to perform by treating the acres needed to secure funding. Copies of the Strategic Plan were distributed to all of RMAC. It was agreed to check on the status of this Plan to determine if it still has any relevance to CDF's mission in fuels management.

J.R. McCollister noted that there is a shift from wildland to WUI areas with agencies and fuel treatment programs. "Quality versus quantity" is the objective as noted in at least two sections of the State Fire Plan; however, he maintained that a case for landscape treatment of vegetation can and should be made. Henry Giacomini asked if all VMP projects are initiated by landowners. J.R. McCollister responded by stating that some are but not all. The Unit may initiate the contact depending on their objectives. Mr. Giacomini stated that as time goes on newer people in the Department are less aware of the benefits of the program.

Ken Zimmerman noted that a combination of issues impact VMP success.

- Program complexity. However, this pertains more to the CDF Coordinator than the landowner.
- Landowner frustration and dissatisfaction when projects are delayed or canceled.
- Contract expiration within three years; however, CDF has no control over this since contract expiration is determined by the Department of General Services and/or statute.

Henry Giacomini stated that there is a problem with public trust in that allowing the government to access private property poses a risk of further regulation and constraints imposed on management depending on what is discovered during environmental review. This results in the program not being utilized to the full extent possible. He posed the question, "What are the protection measures for the landowner to prevent such intrusions." Jeff Stephens and others responded that there are no protections. Environmental review is a matter of public record and may be released to the public, with the exception of cultural resources that are protected by statute.

Ken Zimmerman made statements regarding three issues related to the papers that had been generated by himself and J.R. McCollister as part of the VMP review process.

- One is that trustee agencies are under staffed and do not normally become actively involved in many CEQA documents. This was learned via RMAC's study of the oak woodlands issue.
- Two, Mr. Zimmerman asked for clarification as to what was meant by statements in the paper prepared by J.R. McCollister; "Other non VMP projects." The response was projects involving Range Improvement Burns and pile burning by timber companies. The committee clarified that these types of burns are not conducted by CDF. Related to this discussion is the need for clarification on what treated acres versus project acres actually means as it relates to providing an incentive to Units to conduct burns. Ken Nehoda clarified that the project area can be larger than the just black acres provided the unburned areas form a logical area that benefits from the project. Units can be reimbursed for these unburned areas.
- Third, if the program is not effective at reaching pre-established goals then consideration should be given to eliminating the program.

In response to the comment to eliminate the program J.R. McCollister noted that the Department would not regard reduced acres treated as a failure of the program, but rather changing objectives of the program due to the Fire Plan and emphasis on WUI areas. Ken Zimmerman countered that with federal funds now being channeled through the Fire Safe Councils focused on the WUI areas that this has become the vehicle for treatment and therefore the VMP is no longer needed.

Mike Connor asked how much of the VMP budget actually pays for treatment. Jeff Stephens stated that the budget is approximately \$3.5 million of which \$200,000 is used for reimbursement to the Units for out of pocket costs. The remainder pays for salaries and operating primarily.

Henry Giacomini stated that perhaps what is needed is not elimination of the program but a restructuring of the budget. J.R. McCollister responded by stating that funds should be made available to those that actually do the work. Chuck Pritchard commented stating that what may be needed is a Region work force dedicated to VMP that can form partnerships with private entities that wish to conduct prescribed fire such as Range Improvement Associations, Land Owner Groups, etc. J.R. McCollister responded stating that a Region VMP dedicated work force will be looked upon as an elitist group and not well received by Unit managers. A dedicated work force would have to be under Unit management in order to be accepted and supported. Leonard Hale raised the point that VMP needs to be a priority at the highest level so that it becomes a priority for the Units. J.R. McCollister noted that Unit support currently is a hit or miss proposition. Mike

Connor noted that support is needed for personnel doing the work. They need assurance that management stands behind their work even in the event of an escape provided work is done properly.

Mike Connor raised the issue of how to document the benefits of prescribed burning. Ken Nehoda responded stating there are case histories with State and Federal agencies that demonstrate the benefits. The CDF rate for reimbursing Units for burned acres was also raised.

Jeff Stephens posed the question as to whether CDF should reimburse Units at a rate that is higher than what it costs to conduct the burn as an incentive to do more burning. Henry Giacomini stated yes if the money were banked to do more vegetation management work. Mike Connor felt that reimbursement should be at least enough to pay for the cost of doing the burn but not in excess of the actual cost.

Jeff Stephens asked to speak to RMAC as the VMP Manager versus that of the RMAC Executive Secretary. He outlined three points for consideration by RMAC:

- First, the original goals developed when VMP was created were developed in a different political and environmental climate than what exists today. Rather than eliminate the program perhaps what is needed is a reevaluation of the goals given the politics and environmental concerns of today.
- Second, the VMP has historically been a prescribed fire program. Perhaps what is needed is a program that is more diverse in the type treatments, vegetation types, and circumstances where it may be used. This is a goal of the VMP PEIR.
- Third, when developing recommendations to the Board RMAC may wish to consider the views of some researchers like John Keely (spelling), who maintain that the fires that occurred in the south during October 2003 would have occurred regardless of vegetative stand age or structure developed via fuel treatments. This is because these fires occur under extreme fire weather events associated with low fuel moisture. Therefore it is not a good use of resources to perform large landscape fuel reduction projects; rather it is more useful to concentrate efforts near the values to be protected.

Leonard Hale stated that there are examples, however, where these treatments have made a difference in preventing large catastrophic fires in the south. Mike Conner stated that he has had contact with research staff at UC who shares Keely's views. Jeff Stephens stated that Mr. Hale makes a good point in that CDF should not abandon landscape treatment of vegetation since most firers occur under less than the absolute extreme fire weather conditions. It is these fires where fire behavior can be influenced by modification to fuel, and examples do exist in support of this position.

Ken Zimmerman agreed with Jeff Stephens that a reassessment of program goals may be in order in terms of what is attainable; however, a specific goal of this program should be large landscape treatments for wildlands, and specific goals should be applied to the WUI areas. He further stated that the length of contracts for the WUI areas should be five years with a requirement for two maintenance treatments within the first four years when treatment is critical to maintaining the desired vegetation. Currently maintenance would require going back in under a new agreement once the VMP contract expires in three years. Mr. Zimmerman also noted that there is ample funding for work under the various watershed protection propositions and that these funds may be funneled through the VMP to do work.

Henry Giacomini stated that reevaluation of goals is a possibility; however the problem of accountability still exists. There needs to be consequences for failure to achieve the goals.

Mike Connor spoke in favor of a recommendation that there should be incentive dollars for work that is based on both quantity and quality of work done, and that funding should be pulled back from poor performers and reallocated to the Units that do perform.

Mel Thompson asked the question as to whether we should load the entire responsibility to do work on one agency. There are a whole collection of groups that have a stake in fuels treatment. Home owner groups may use grants to complete the work with CDF contributing.

Ken Zimmerman stated that in the case of prescribed fire we lose the CMP PEIR for CEQA compliance. There is a value to having VMP take the lead in the project.

Mike Connor stated that our charge is to recommend how to improve VMP and proposed that a new outline be devised. Ken Zimmerman cited the Oak Woodland Forum as a structure that worked. The existing program was evaluated, recommendations were considered and the pluses and minuses, alternatives were selected for evaluation.

Mike Connor asked if RMAC needs to discuss alternative that are rejected. Ken Zimmerman stated that there needs to be some shock value (referring to possible elimination of the program) in order to make significant change.

The group by way of discussion then developed the following list of issues that should be covered:

Alternatives/Issues:

Eliminate the VMP Program:	(Introduction by Mike Connor)
Set Qualitative Goals:	(Recommendation by J.R. McCollister)
Reallocation of Resources:	(Introduction by Mike Connor)
Commitment / Incentives:	(Recommendation by Chuck Pritchard)
Streamline the Process:	(by Henry Giacomini)
a. Expanded PEIR	
b. Categorical Exemption	
Complete Tool Box – Treatments:	(by Mike Connor)
Define the Goals: (by J.R. McCollister)	
a. Resource Protection versus Values at Risk	
Funding Options:	(by Leonard Hale)
Integrate Programs / Projects:	(by Chuck Pritchard & Ken Zimmerman)
Dedicated Workforce:	(by Chuck Pritchard)
Local Partnership:	(by Ken Zimmerman)
Define Program Objectives:	(by Henry Giacomini & J.R. McCollister)
Maintenance:	(by Ken Zimmerman)
Public Outreach:	(by Mel Thompson)
VMP Coordinator – Forester:	(by J.R. McCollister)
Fire Plan:	(J.R. McCollister)

Benefits:

Cost Analysis
 Programmatic CEQA Document
 Liability
 Range Improvement
 Fuel Reduction
 Air Quality Improvement
 Wildlife Habitat Improvement
 Proactive versus reactive
 Public and Private Safety

Discussion of the Alternatives/Issues/Benefits noted above concluded the meeting.

Meeting Adjourned 5:00 P.M.