

Tulare Basin Watershed Network

Landscape-scale Resilience - Collaborating Across the Tule River and Deer Creek Watersheds Meeting Notes

August 18, 2022 | Virtual Convening

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Links and Resources

General links

- [Meeting Agenda](#)
- [Event Presentation](#)
- [Event video](#)
 - 0:00 - 12:07 - Introductions and Opening Comments
 - 12:08 - 21:00 - Adam Livingston - *Southern Sierra Partnership*
 - 21:00 - 33:10 - Jeff Powers and Larry Saslaw - *Sequoias to the Sloughs*
 - 33:11 - 40:45 - Denise Kadara - *Allensworth Progressive Association (preview)*
 - 40:46 - 52:33 - Samantha Arthur - *Lower Deer Creek Watershed Plan*
 - 52:34 - 1:00:40 - Reyn Akiona - *Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing in the Tule Subbasin*
 - 1:00:41 - 1:11:00 - Open Discussion
 - 1:11:01 - 1:15:16 - Ways to Engage & Closing Comments

Links provided by speakers

- Adam Livingston - Southern Sierra Partnership
 - [Slides](#)
- Jeff Powers and Larry Saslaw - Sequoias to the Sloughs
 - [Slides](#)
 - [Sequoia to the Sloughs Map](#)
 - [Tulare Lake Basin map](#)
 - Map 2
- Denise Kadara - Allensworth Progressive Association (preview)
 - [Twitter page](#)
- Samantha Arthur - Lower Deer Creek Watershed Plan
 - [Slides](#)
- Reyn Akiona - Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing in the Tule Subbasin
 - [Slides](#)

Event Highlights

- **Southern Sierra Partnership, Adam Livingston**
 - The Southern Sierra Partnership (SPP) is a coalition of business and conservation organizations serving 7 million acres, from the peak of the Sierra mountains to Route 99. The SPP Regional Conservation Design Overview showcases the important connectivity between the Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin valley as not separate regions, but one interdependent super region with hydrological connections. SPP is looking to build connectivity on a corridor that stretches across most of the valley floor: stretching from the Sierra Foothills down Deer Creek out into Pixley National Wildlife Refuge.
- **Sequoias to the Sloughs Project, Jeff Powers and Larry Saslaw**
 - The Sequoias to the Sloughs project is taking a whole watershed approach to resilience and is focused on Deer Creek Watershed. The Forest service is stretched thin serving the Upper-Middle watersheds. Through the Sequoias to the Sloughs project, the TBWN hopes to build a coalition for the entire watershed, which will increase capacity building, funding, and amplifying our voice to ultimately help the Forest Service get work done in the basin.
- **Allensworth Progressive Association, Denise Kadara**
 - The Allensworth Progressive Association has been working on a community plan for a long time and recently got awarded \$55 million dollars for community projects. Allensworth is facing many challenges, including flooding, water quality and supply, soil degradation, and air quality. All of the projects they are working on will be to address those challenges.
- **Lower Deer Creek Watershed Plan, Samantha Arthur**
 - The Nature Conservancy and Audubon CA partnered with Pixley GSA to apply for federal funding to create a watershed plan for the Lower Deer Creek Watershed. The Lower Deer Creek Watershed Plan supports the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). The plan includes restoring and transitioning 17,000 acres of farmland to upland habitat or wildlife friendly recharge sites.
- **Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing in the Tule Subbasin, Reyn Akiona**
 - The Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing program is working with GSA's to address sustainability issues with groundwater and implement a challenging mandate to take 115,000 acres-feet of water out of commission in the subbasin. Reyn emphasized that this is a difficult topic with many hard decisions, this has huge economic impacts, and those in the basin are experiencing unprecedented landscape changes.

Meeting Notes

Introduction from TBWN

- *Matt Hurley, General Manager, McMullin Area GSA/Tranquility RCD*
 - Welcome! The intention of this event is to learn about recent Landscape-scale resilience projects in the Tulare Basin.
 - A brief history about TBWN
 - Matt shares how across the basin different organizations and entities have been competing for money, resources, and partnerships. He shares that a critical element for the network is moving toward coordination and collaboration. The network is about increasing commitment, reliance, and communication between all parties involved towards achieving a higher goal.
- *Logan Robertson Huecker, Executive Director, Sequoia Riverland Trust*
 - Logan outlines the purpose of the TBWN network is to increase resilience, which the network defines as the capacity of a system to recover from and adapt to shock and stress in ways that enhance the system's integrity.
 - She shares how the work of this network is to shift towards economic, social, and ecosystems functioning as interdependent systems. The TBWN's big goal is to "Establish and enhance watershed health and resilience across the Tulare Basin by 2040."

Program Overview from Speakers and Q&A

Speakers:

Adam Livingston, Director of Planning and Policy, Southern Sierra Partnership

Jeff Powers, Director of Stewardship, Sequoia Riverlands Trust

Larry Saslaw, Vice President, TBWN, former Wildlife Biologist at the Bureau of Land Management

Denise Kadara, President, Allensworth Progressive Association

Samantha Arthur, Working Lands Program Director at National Audubon Society

Reyn Akiona, Executive Director, Valley Eco

PROGRAM 1: Southern Sierra Partnership

Adam Livingston, Director of Planning and Policy, Southern Sierra Partnership

- The Southern Sierra Partnership (SPP) is a coalition of business and conservation organizations serving 7 million acres through the peak of Sierra mountains to 99 (middle of Valley Floor).
- SPP Framework Overview
 - Adam explains the SPP Framework, which is a climate adaptation study completed in 2010. The study assessed what we need to protect (environmental services) in order to maintain habitat for migratory species. This study led to the SSP Regional Conservation Design.
- SSP Regional Conservation Design Overview
 - Adam explains how this design shows land areas that should be prioritized for conservation efforts. In addition, the design showcases the important connectivity between Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin valley as not separate regions, but one interdependent super region with hydrological connection.
- Priority Riparian Corridors

- The SSP prioritizes connectivity through riparian corridors. Deer Creek out to the edge of the map is a priority area. SPP is looking to build connectivity on a corridor that stretches across most of the valley floor: stretching from the Sierra Foothills down Deer Creek out into Pixley National Wildlife Refuge. Lots of exciting opportunities there!

Q&A

- Q: What is the elevation of the Eastern Boundary? (Of the SPP Frameworks)
 - A: The peaks of the Sierra's, about 14,000.

PROGRAM 2: Sequoias to the Sloughs Project

Jeff Powers, Director of Stewardship, Sequoia Riverlands Trust

Larry Saslaw, Vice President, TBWN, and former Wildlife Biologist at the Bureau of Land Management

- The Sequoias to the Sloughs project is taking a whole watershed approach to resilience and is focused on Deer Creek Watershed.
- Why a whole Watershed Approach?
 - Jeff explains that they are taking a whole watershed approach because watershed's act as one system. What happens in the upper watershed like water recharge, soil fertility, and increased biodiversity affects the lower watershed.
- Why the Deer Creek Watershed?
 - Jeff shares they are focused on the Deer Creek Watershed because it has been highlighted by many sources, including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, as a great natural resource for the area. They are proposing this project to be a pilot for collaborating with stakeholders across the region.
- Larry provided background on the Upper-Middle Watershed
 - Larry explains the Forest service is stretched thin with serving the Upper-Middle watersheds. They are at capacity with NEPA and supporting environmental planning efforts.
 - He explains they are hoping through the Sequoias to the Sloughs project to build a coalition for the entire watershed which will increase capacity building, funding, and amplifying our voice to ultimately help the Forest Service get work done here.
 - He shares in regards to the ranch and grazing lands that they are looking at how landowners can manage their land with public dollars. For the middle watershed, how can TBWN help private landowners access and share resources, like how to improve stream and creek conditions on their lands.
- Fish and Wildlife service gave TBWN a grant to conduct Communications and Outreach with Key stakeholders and Allies.
 - Jeff shares how TBWN is building a list of key stakeholders to outreach too. Let TBWN know if you are interested in being involved.

Q&A

- Q: When we reference the subbasin here are we discussing the boundaries defined as those covered by GSA's?
 - A: Yes, that is a subbasin that is covered by GSA's
- Q: What do you hope your pilot project will show about scaling this work at the Basin level?
 - Jeff A: These are pilot projects to figure these issues out. We want to find projects that can be replicated across the basin. Hopefully we get more funding for this.
 - Adam A: This is a major milestone that this program was established and seed money is coming in.
- Comments

- Cathy Capone: Suggests TBWN contact Alta Peak Chapter of the California Native Plant Society & Tulare Parkway Association for outreach efforts
- Gregory - SRT: I don't know if the American Farmland Trust is represented or has been approached by the network yet, but they are specifically hiring for positions across the state (including the valley) to work as "conservation technicians" - essentially employees of the trust who will be engaging with and creating educational and outreach material for farmers in order to teach them about conservation methods and connect them with funding for various projects. I read most of what I know about their work through CalCAN (California Climate & Agricultural Network).

PROGRAM 3: Allensworth Progressive Association Denise Kadara, President, Allensworth Progressive Association

- Denise shares how Allensworth has been working on our community plan for sometime now. They put a proposal together and met with legislative staff and got awarded \$55 million dollars for community projects. Money is funding many projects, including Civic Plaza, Teaching and Innovation Forum (Economic Development), and many more....
- Teaching and Innovation Forum Project Overview
 - This forum will be the Organic Farming Hub of SW Tulare. The hub will offer a 6 month training with housing, accommodations, and a stipend provided. They will be training people on a closed loop farming system.
 - This is an essential project because Allensworth is a food desert. They don't have any grocery stores or crops growing. The Organic Farming Hub will be the economic engine for Allensworth.
- Allensworth is facing many challenges: Flooding, water quality and supply, soil degradation, and air quality. All of the projects they are working on will be working to address those challenges.

Q&A

- Q: Is agroecological farming and an equity overlay a frame that is being brought forward in the program? Providing income and steward resources.
 - A: We are looking at acquiring additional land as part of this program, bringing additional land to be part of an organic farming coop, which will address the agrobusiness question. With repurposing, we want to improve the quality of life, environment stewardship, by bringing in additional homes and improving the sewer system management at a regional basis - can be part of that recharge basin. At the State of the Basin event you can learn more. We are also including agroecological considerations into the program.
- Q: How has the news about the potential for more flooding influenced your infrastructure improvement?
 - A: We've been talking about increased flooding events in CA for a while. These conversations have been on the table for a while.

PROGRAM 4: Lower Deer Creek Watershed Plan Samantha Arthur, Working Lands Program Director at National Audubon Society

- The Nature Conservancy and Audubon CA partnered with Pixley GSA to apply for federal funding to create a watershed plan for the Lower Deer Creek Watershed.
- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

- The Lower Deer Creek Watershed Plan works to implement the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). SGMA mandates the reduction of the over pumping of water in the region. The plan includes transitioning 17,000 acres of farmland in the Pixley GSA and of that acres, restoring 15,000 acres to upland habitat and transitioning 2,000 to wildlife-friendly recharge sites.
- Planning Process Overview
 - Samantha explains how they are currently creating environmental documents so they can get NEPA certifications for the program sites. She explains they are creating the plan to gain more funding for restoration actions in upland habitat and wildlife friendly recharge sites. In the planning process they prioritized agriculture lands that should be restored to wildlife friendly recharge. In addition, they assessed sites that work to reduce risks and increase benefits to marginalized communities.
- One Project Summary:
 - Strategic Following Pilot Program (Learn more in the speaker presentation)

Q&A

- Q: On the map, have you looked further west at the Buena Vista drainage area (the ponds and Tulare Basin district areas)? These are recharge areas. History of conservation activity in that region.
 - A: We haven't looked further west because of jurisdiction regions, we have to stay below a certain acreage limit in the plan.
- Q: How are you incorporating social equity considerations into this program?
 - We are exploring developing a Farmer Advisory Group to make sure there is inclusive engagement around people who will be financially impacted by this.
- Q: What do you hope your pilot project will show about scaling this work at the Basin level?
 - A: Scalability is a huge question around recharge. In our effort, we looked at sites we knew could be eligible for this, they were owned by the GSA. So limited scalability. It depends on how much water is available in those years and water rights, especially when talking about basins/aquifers.

PROGRAM 5: Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing in the Tule Subbasin Reyn Akiona, Watershed Coordinator, Tule Basin, and Executive Director at Valley Eco

- Reyn shared how his objective is to work in the Tule subbasin with the 6 GSA's to address sustainability issues with groundwater: Ecological, Water Security, Agronomic issues.
- He shared they are working on the land repurposing project and with that project comes important disclaimers:
 - This is a hard topic with many hard decisions.
 - This has big economic impacts.
 - People in the basin are experiencing unprecedented landscape changes.
- Reyn discussed how the challenge that the GSAs are tasked with is that 115,000 acres-feet of water needs to be pulled out of commission in the subbasin.
- In the context of these challenges, the Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing program is trying to address key topics (in the presentation).
- The Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing program is working on these deliverables:
 - Develop a Multibenefit Ag Land Repurposing Research and Plan
 - Our regional planning is focused on low water available grounds and solutions related to micro-geography.

- Completed a project design and permitting
- Implement land repurposing projects
- Support regional capacity needs
- Conduct outreach, education, and training
- Perform project monitoring

Q&A

- Q: How are you incorporating social equity considerations into this program?
 - A: We are looking at Community Based Evaluations, which is an Environmental Justice framework that identifies and focuses on community water systems around marginalized communities. Looking at prioritizing land repurposing and recharge around those communities. So the first water in and last water out are in those key community zones.
- Q: What do you hope your pilot project will show about scaling this work at the Basin level?
 - A: When we talk about pilots, we truly mean “pilots,” we are trying to build efficiency and models that can be used for uplands. 500,000 is a testing ground now. Community based recharge projects - concerns around are we going to mobilize existing contamination in the soil in those areas. These are true pilots - we are experimenting.
- Follow Up Q: There is angst, depression, sadness, anger - it's not a good frame of mind for people to be facing their own private catastrophic loss. In your pilot projects, you are not involved in the same emotional way. How are we going to get to solutions that are going to be acceptable to the community that are going to have to face that loss?
 - Follow Up Reyn A: Nothing that I have come across is the solution that takes the pain of SGMA away. Just because an ecologist comes in within this context, it is dangerous to assume they are disconnected from landscape value. It's a community effort to take a bite out of these issues wherever possible.
 - Adam (SRT) Follow Up A: People who make their living from the land, as many as those people need to be involved in the solution. We need more resources. For people who are looking at catastrophic financial losses, if we can offer some kind of resource that will address the loss they are experiencing. Similar to livelihood loss, how can we provide other jobs and retrain people (like in restoration and long-term stewardships of ag land jobs).