Tulare Basin Watershed Partnership Network:

**2nd Quarterly Meeting Notes** 6.11.21

**Highlights**

Two Breakout groups discussed in some depth the priorities and potential solutions for the upper and lower watersheds, knowing that the ‘middle watershed’ intersects and connects both.

The following reflects what we’d consider a poll on the interest involving certain priorities and solutions. It is not a definitive or final vote as much as an indicator. As such these are still subject to change based upon further data, advocacy, insight and collective understanding. Nonetheless they are a great place to start to focus our efforts to explore and develop high-leverage solutions for the balance of the year and beyond.

Special note: while not called out explicitly in most of the priorities below, *inclusion and equity issues* could and should be explored and integrated in most of them, where appropriate. This and other cross-cutting elements, like climate resilience and broad economic benefits, will be addressed in subsequent meetings.

[Link to the Breakout Group slides](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1sa8Agjhq1LEaE34-P14zJabpeCTJgZwT7EI5YyYebKs/edit?usp=sharing)

**Upper Watershed Priorities**

1. **Integrated watershed restoration** (and management) - (6 votes) this is a holistic approach that connects various strategies together to ensure maximum systemic benefits, rather than isolated, low-leverage/shallow practices with limited or unsustainable impacts. This is an approach rather than a specific solution in that multiple solutions and practices can fit within it.
   1. (3 votes) includes identifying priority areas and beginning to track progress and impacts so that we know interventions and landscape treatments are having the intended impacts, can generate lessons learned and insights for future work.
   2. Includes forest thinning and fuels reduction. Most likely mechanical initially to reduce loads and then ongoing ‘maintenance’ and stewardship using prescribed burns. This solution can reduce fire risks to habitat and humans, reduce GHG reductions, increase water infiltration and recharge, and reduce downstream sedimentation and water quality risks.
2. **Riparian Restoration** (3 votes)

This priority focuses more on the water courses themselves to restore and protect them through a range of practices including cattle fencing along streams, reduced and well-managed grazing in upper meadows, native vegetation enhancements along water courses, removal of select invasives (arundo, tamarisk), and the use of beaver dam analogs (BDA’s) to capture and slow water, especially in areas where beavers historically lived. These serve as a series of small dams to slow, spread and recharge water. As desirable as it is, reintroduction/translocation of actual beavers is limited, by law, to federal lands.

1. **Permanent protection and conservation of high priority areas** (2 votes) in this (and adjacent) watersheds per the work of the Southern Sierra Partnership. Their Restoration Conservation Framework is actively supported by TBWPN members and aligns with our interests.
   1. Aligned with the first two priorities, it acknowledges the need for conservation measures that are ideally permanent legal protections but also acknowledge that stewardship practices on lands without easements or trust ownership are important steps towards protection.

**Lower Watershed Priorities**

1. Strategic permanent fallowing of agricultural lands with funding incentives for landowners (CE purchase, etc..) (5 votes)
   1. Voluntary idling and the term of easement or sale of property to a conservation group or admin ( 1vote)
   2. Incentive based land retirement program; per Don’s point, Section 218 is something to rally around in terms of fallowing/repurposing & paying farmers, block grants (1 vote)
2. New groundwater recharge basins in strategic locations (3 votes)
3. Position the group to receive block funding and distribute to the network (3 votes)

*Also of interest but not top vote getters. Using “Both/And” Thinking these could be potentially incorporated into the above or be minor/smaller efforts pursued in parallel with the priorities above.*

1. Youth Education (2 votes)
2. Increase consolidation of water systems for rural communities to improve economies of scale (1 vote)

**Input on the Education and Outreach Event(s)**

1. #1 Topic of Interest: *Effective Landscape-scale Watershed Restoration & Resilience Strategies & Applications in the Tulare Basin Watershed*

* focus on effective practices & research in the Tahoe Central Sierra Initiative, Lake Tahoe West Restoration project
* specific practices & tools to map, prioritize, and enable investment in the region; accelerated funding readiness given current CA budget
* Target timeframe: July-August 2021

2) #2 Topic of Interest: *Advanced Water Management Strategies in the Lower Parts of the Tulare Basin Watershed*

* focus on the work in the East Kaweah Subbasin and beyond
* Specific practices involving targeted recharge, land use planning & repurposing, demand reduction, and more; accelerated funding readiness given current CA budget
  + Target speakers: Mike Hagman (East Kaweah GSA), Ann Hayden (EDF), Stacy Ann Silva (New Current Land & Water)
* Target timeframe: August 2021

3) #3 Topic of Interest: Coordination and Integration of upper, middle, lower watershed strategies, methods, tools

* Integrating the above, plus feasibility and potential in aligning Integrated Regional Water Mgmt and SGMA efforts
* Target date: September

**Detailed Notes**

Rob Hansen giving an overview of the Deer Creek map

Robert G introduced new folks in the meeting

Matt H interconnected ecosystem

Slow down and do this right

Matt going over the “Value of Landscape-based Network

**Breakout Groups:** *What are the benefits to you and your org to have a landscape based regional network like this?*

Rob H: WBL, did a presentation on the Natural HIstory of the Tulare Lake region, they were very receptive. All students who live in area where they know little about the pre-human history of the area. Hope the WBL can take advantage of traditional knowledge of our region. Looking to connect

Adam Livingston: SRT, built in partnerships, collective projects, showing we have support and partnerships in place when going after funding. More broadly value in info sharing, having a clear idea of what's going on in the region as a whole,

Julie Vance: Info sharing, collaboration, really being able to have power in numbers for grants and land acquisition dollars, much more than others… Great to see this effort in the CV, we are a little more scattered and other areas are more organized and grant dollars flow to specific part of the state, help to make us more competitive pulling from all areas of expertise

Safeeq: Connecting and collaboration between the headwater & valley floor folks.

Julie Allen: Built in partnerships, emphasis of going from local small scale concerns into broader regional concerns that feeds into grant funding concerns

Rob: Broad agency, expertise from all sorts of levels and perspectives

Don Cameron: Stronger together, working as a group strong expertise & knowledge, draw from different experiences to get things done here on the ground

Carole: A point Matt made, this is a chance given the severity of the drought to think boldly ahead about flood potentials, water bank planning, thinking very progressively and pushing innovative solutions

Rob: A crisis is a terrible thing to waste. Think boldly & differently about things.

Don Cameron: with the new state budget surplus there will be a lot of $$$ available for shovel ready projects geared toward habitat restoration. Opportunities coming quickly, the better prepared we are the better.

Once in a generation chance of funding. Strike while the iron’s hot.

**Breakout Groups to Discuss Priorities for the Region**

*High-Level priorities: slide, upper watershed, watershed connectivity (Sequoias to the Sloughs) project, Advanced water management in the valley. & storage/reservoir management*

*Going deeper now with a deeper focus. Short intro, what am I doing now to work on these issues, and looking ahead what do you want to see happen,*

**Notes for the Lower Half of Watershed Group**

(Notes for Upper watershed are in the Breakout group’s slide (linked above))

Don Cameron: Gen Mgr/Vice Pres Terra Bella Ranch, known for groundwater recharge. Developed it & working on it for over 30 years, CDFA Science Adv Panel, Healthy Soils Program and others to benefit the state, Pres of CDFA Board

Julie V: CA Dept Fish & Wildlife, covers 12 counties

Mike CHrisman: Former Sec Nat Resources, Kaweah Delta Water Conservation District working on GSA, Board of Tulare Co RCD

Cathy Capone: Member of CA Native Plant Soc & Pres of Tule River Park Association. Working on several ways increasing use of Native plants in urban areas

Rob H: Just retired from COS, looking forward to learning more about things like Don mentioned and working with others to do great work

Kayode: Allensworth Comm leader, board of Self Help Ent, & school board, working on compost machine and soil health on TAC Farm, looking to make compost tea.

Richard H: North CA Enviro Defense Center in CHico,

Denise Cuevas: New to EPA, EPA assistant to Santa Rosa Rancheria Tribe

Abby Hart: Nature Conservancy, working on Lower Deer Creek Watershed Plan, Lower Tule project w NRCS, SttS involved w Dan Vink

Guadalupe Garcia: Project Coordinator with Ag Innovations  
  
Strategic permanent ~~fallowing~~ repurposing for targeted lands, potential for habitat restoration, recharge opportunities. New groundwater recharge basins in strategic locations

Rob H: Encourage incentive base land retirement. Encourage it for all the reasons mentioned by Matt earlier today. Upland habitat refugee & upland species

Don Cameron: Voluntary program for habitat restoration and flooding and groundwater recharge are not mutually exclusive. Land purchases, not just easements,,, I know as a grower we put land into habitat restoration the public considers it as permanent but as a grower you know that longterm things could change.

Voluntary idling, def of easements, or terms of easements, flooding & habitat restoration are no mutually exclusive

Matt & water banking.

Mike Chrisman: Sig lands in the white areas (no supplemental surface water, this effort should focus on something like that. Really pay attention to this.

Substantial funding for this kind of activity

Cathy Capone: Improving habitat for wildlife & decrease water use in urban landscapes

Youth education

Kayode: In some of our areas recharge isn't a possibility because of the clay area so looking at those areas for retention basins

Increase water infrastructure consolidation

Is there a method for doing this? West Lake Farms trying to get drainage easements, serve a winter storage function and mitigation function

Mike Chrisman: Anyone ask the big landowners about all this? Like the Boswells? [Good question to answer as a solution gets developed.]

Julie Vance: Increased attempt to go after fully appropriated streams to see if there are any excess   
  
That will make things a lot more difficult. Got to be careful

Re-appropriation rights make things more difficult? State Water Board won’t want to do that, they’ll want us to work together. Gotta be careful, or it will trigger readjudication.

Lawsuits coming quickly especially when implementation begins. Need to have conversations about this now. The things we are talking about here take time. Must be voluntary and incentive based.

Good collaborative opportunity for this collaboration. The start of this begins in the next 5 years. Already heard one grower say they will keep pumping until they get surface water

No one has cracked the code of treating high selenium

.- Using treated water on specific things that can handle selenium (e.g., hay), won’t be a part of the general supply.

Abby Hart: Broker of different programs. For the vision of restoring Ag lands, put together a comprehensive program that GSAs can participate in but covers a wider area

Some of the new state budget funding made available in Block Grants to distribute broadly, go after those funds and divvy them out. We want to be strategic so that we don’t have land repurposing here and there. Like the idea of the Deer Creek project is so good as a model of connectivity to show what we can do . If everyone does their own thing we can’t gain from economies of scale.   
  
Mike Chrisman: Need to identify strategic projects in strategic areas so that we can show landowners their options & provide options along the way.

Richard H: When landowners had to start taking care of the “tail water” (reusing water that runs off from irrigation). Maybe follow that model.

Don C: Go after funding to buy the land. Everybody in the region pays and everyone benefits.

GSAs are never going to work together.