

Prevention Tools: Assessing the risk for weed spread when planning ground-disturbing projects

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Note taker: Mark Dedon, PG&E

Attendees

Chris Christofferson, Plumas National Forest
Daina, USFWS SFBay NWR
Joy Albertson, USFWS
Don Edwards
Sarah Sweet, design restoration contractor
Peter Beesley
Vanessa Lee, Burns and MacDonald, Ontario
Ben, Wildscape Restoration, Ventura
John Boland, ecologist
Steve Davidson, SF Bay area
Linda Hammel, CalTrans
Deborah Beaver
Robin, CDFG
Wendy West, UC Cooperative Extension

Introduction

Chris: An important first step is to educate the people who are performing the work on ground-disturbing projects, to become more knowledgeable about weed infestations. We need to write documents to analyze effects of the operations (timber, fire, etc), including effects on both rare plants and invasive species. Have a noxious weed risk assessment. In 1997, USFS had first meeting in Morro Bay. In 1999, Feinstein supported the Quincy Library Act. As part of that, biologists wanted to consider invasive species in environmental analysis. Every project on the Plumas NF must have a risk assessment. The Sierra Nevada Framework now requires noxious weed risk assessment for projects. Chris spoke with a number of agencies to see what they currently do. A Noxious Weed Risk Assessment (NWRA) starts with an inventory to see what's out there.

Question and Answer Session

Q: Are NWRAs done at a project level?,

A: Yes. If you have a 5,000-acre project, then you do surveys for rare plants and invasive species. Go to campground, trail heads, etc. Look for habitat vulnerability, and for Project Dependent Vectors (e.g. bulldozers and fire). On mitigation measures, USFS differs than most other organizations. USFS can codify that "you will" clean equipment before it comes on the job site.

Q: How do contractors get trained?

A: USFS has developed a relationship over many years to educate contractors.

Q: Do construction contractors police themselves?

A: No, the persons doing the policing are the USFS inspectors. These are the “sale administrators.” One of the biggest things we do is clean equipment. If you know you will be operating in a contaminated area, you can mandate that it gets cleaned before moving. Another contract clause is for weed-free mulch and fill. This can be harder to mandate if it is not available. Chris will call around and look for it and then provide to contractors. In Butte County USFS works with quarry to certify it—Chris does this. Other provisions include mandating that they remove Italian thistle within 30 feet of the road.

Wendy: There is a good source on the Center for Invasive Plant Management (www.weedcenter.org) on steps to certify gravel and fill material suppliers. This is a non-regulatory approach.

Peter: In working with procurement department, is anyone aware of general guidelines to contract management above and beyond BMPs? Caltrans has very extensive guidelines for fill, saying do not take across counties lines.

Wendy: Huge need as a community for procurement departments to have appropriate language in the contracts. Need to pull this together.

Chris: LOPs for rare plants. Used this for Scotch Broom control. Cut in the fall to get a better kill.

Chris: Assigning controlled areas can work well for isolating units with high infestations. Problem is to get areas delineated and keeping them delineated. All provisions go into a big table that consolidates environmental concerns and LOPs.

Q: How is equipment actually cleaned?

Chris: High-pressure washers at wash stations. We use a digging bar to remove loose soil. If something is grease-laden, we’re not as concerned. Caltrans cannot put water to soil. Must drive rumble strips.

Q: In conducting an inventory for new route or trail, how far out do you look?

A: Decide what is the window of disturbance? Site specific.

Monitoring

Need to get funding on the front end. Get through reforestation—can go out after the work. Can go back and check on the replanting for noxious weeds. Can’t say what are the effects of the logging.

Chris spoke with other groups like Rob Hill at Butte Co. Ag. Office. Internally, they can review site. Inform landowner that weed exists and ask landowner to follow a noxious weed plan and sign off on mitigation measures. What does county do? Nothing. No resources.

Wendy: RCD had opportunity to review permits at the county level.

Peter: Are there basic BMPs that work but don't impact the work?

Chris: I try to tie fire fuels reduction to fighting noxious weeds

Cal Dept. of Forestry and Fire Protection plays a role. CDFG has to demonstrate a significant impact on the environment before noxious weeds can be codified into contracts. So having the research to show is helpful.

Chris spoke with Paul Kirk of the Sacramento River Partners in Chico. Convert agricultural land to riparian. After planting they spray early with herbicides to suppress noxious weeds. They have also found that some natives out-compete the weeds, like Gredila, Artemesia, native grasses.

Monica Finn of CalTrans: is concerned about inconsistencies of seed mixes for revegetation. She thinks better communication is needed. Caltrans is big on composting and it's important to ensure no weed seeds. There is no clean compost yet in California. Texas is leading this due to all the cattle. Idaho DOT did 1:1 slope with composting. Worked great. Expensive. Someone said pine needles have been used as mulch. Could have weeds.

Chris: On the last point made by Monica—enforcement is a big challenge. CalTrans-BMPs are in contract language. Stormwater BMPs is the big ticket now.

Q: How much of the time are contractors trained?

A: All the time. If you want a promotion you must have "certification." Caltrans uses training module that employees sign off on. Two languages.

Chris also spoke with Jim Dempsey in State Parks in Chico. Jim's big thing—if creating an opening, need to plant natives immediately because something else will come in.

Q: Where is everyone else with BMPs?

Issue for one organization is that BMPs are not actually followed. Are there inspectors? Only the big projects. Is there a review process for performance? Yes, but only for large-scale projects. From Caltrans experience, you must hit the contractors with the dollar or it won't happen. There needs to be some hammer in the contract language.

Situation where Arundo is growing on the banks and the city bulldozes the channel and arundo is spreading all over San Diego. What permits are needed? Could you put BMPs in the permit? Spray afterwards. Should be part of the Army Corps of Engineers permit. Suggestion to communicate with PM about the problem. There is good science on how arundo clogs the flood channel. Need to get the right information to the right people. Through Caltrans, the stormwater permit drives what is going to happen.

How to get buy-in at upper level to conduct training.

Staffing is an issue for one organization. At the very least have a support truck that washes the equipment.

Suggestion to have rental companies take some measures to keep equipment clean.

Sources of BMP language: the Center for Invasive Plant Management has it broken down for specific audiences. "Invasive plant prevention guidelines" at www.weedcenter.org. They have a ton of resources. This also includes the sand and gravel certification, and sources for weed-free lists.

There was a conference on developing bid specifications for controlling weeds.

Wendy wants to pull together language from multiple sources. Cal-IPC may start doing this with Wendy's help.