

Project Charter: Fire Research Consensus Project

Approved: May 6, 2016

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Approved: May 6 20, 2016

1. Introduction

This document provides an overview of the Fire Research Consensus (FRC) Project, jointly funded by the Science for Nature and People Partnership (SNAPP) and the Wilburforce Foundation. The FRC Project brings together representatives from diverse geographic and scientific backgrounds to identify common ground related to the role of fire in pine, mixed conifer, and cold subalpine forests across the western US, so as to inform public policy and management decision-making.

This document is subject to periodic review and refinement by the FRC Project Steering Committee and will be updated as needed. The FRC project was approved by the SNAP partnership in January, 2015. Our current timeline anticipates activities throughout 2016 and completion in 2017.

1.1 Background and Project Rationale

For forested areas in the western US, fire is widely seen as one of the most important conservation uncertainties, as it directly affects the health and well-being of people living near fire-prone landscapes as well as those who depend on water and other ecosystem services and products. The effective management of fire and fire-related risks in such areas is of growing concern, particularly in the face of climate change and given several high-profile fire incidents in recent years.

There is, however, increasingly contentious scientific debate over how much high-severity fire should be considered “natural” in conifer forests across the western U.S. The core of ongoing scientist disagreement revolves around what the natural frequency-size distribution of high-severity patches should be in various dry, moist, and cold forests, based on reconstructions of pre-management era conditions.

In many policy and management arenas—from national forest policy to state-level management and individual stand prescriptions—the debate about the role of fire has made the effective integration of science into public policy decision-making more challenging, inhibiting informed planning and management.

In the context of this debate, the FRC Project seeks to engage leading scientists in a collaborative dialogue process to identify shared scientific views in the context of future climate change, and generate products that reflect the common ground among researchers so as to support informed planning and management decision-making. The FRC will also engage with land managers and other stakeholders with relevant knowledge and experience, such as staff from The Nature Conservancy and other NGOs and National Forest fire management staff, both to help inform the collaborative dialogue process as it proceeds, and also to assist planners and managers in utilizing final project outputs for effective decision-making.

The Fire Research Consensus project builds on earlier discussions from the 2014 COMPASS Fire Science Communication Workshop, which included several fire researchers from a broad spectrum of scientific viewpoints. At this workshop, it became clear that shared scientific views among most researchers were actually the norm, as opposed to the exception, which provided support for additional efforts to seek common ground in a more formal way.

1.2 Lead Investigators and Project Steering Committee

The Principal Investigators (PIs) for the FRC Project are:

- Max Moritz, University of California, Berkeley; and,

- Chris Topik, the Nature Conservancy.

Overall guidance for the FRC project is provided by a Steering Committee that is comprised of the Principal Investigators plus the following individuals (each representing different regions in the western US or specific viewpoints on the issues at hand):

- Craig D. Allen, USGS, Jemez Mountains Field Station;
- Dennis Odion, University of California, Santa Barbara;
- Paul Hessburg, USFS, PNWRS & University of Washington, Seattle;
- Penny Morgan, University of Idaho, Moscow;
- Tom Veblen, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Additional steering committee members may be added, as needed, at the discretion of the PIs and the existing steering committee.

A Process Support Team, operating under the supervision of the Principal Investigators, supports the work of the FRC Project Steering Committee and includes an independent process facilitator and, subject to funding, a research assistant, and a project administrator. The *Terms of Reference* for the FRC project Steering Committee is included as Appendix A.

1.3 Project Supporters

The FRC project is jointly supported by the Science for Nature and People (SNAP) partnership and the Wilburforce Foundation. The SNAP Partnership has multiple supporters; it is a collaboration of The Nature Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Society and the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS).

2. Project Scope

2.1 Project Purpose and Goals

The broad purpose of the FRC Project is develop a consensus statement that can inform current and future planning and management decision-making, and that is supported by key constituencies, related to the role of high-severity fire in western coniferous forests, fire regimes, various fuel treatments and other related topics.

More specifically, the goals of the FRC Project are as follows:

1. Assess the range of science-based perspectives related to the role of high-severity fire in western coniferous forests.
2. On a selective basis, identify the scope and nature of divergent, science-based perspectives that inhibit informed decision-making related to the role of high-severity fire in western coniferous forests, and clarify some of the key the research questions and underlying data sets needed to resolve these differences.
3. Generate a written 'consensus statement' that reflects the common ground among scientists related to the role of high-severity fire in western coniferous forests and its relevance to broader ecosystem management, particularly in the context of future climate change.
4. Disseminate the consensus statement and other outputs from the project through a variety of channels and mechanisms, and engage actively with land and fire managers to support evidence-based planning and management decision-making.

2.2 Scope of FRC Project

Although both the scientific debate related to fire history and knowledge gaps are real, the precise scope of policy and management decisions that actually hinge on resolving specific aspects of the conflict have not always been well defined. This is particularly true in the context of an uncertain future that will be impacted by climate change and continued human development.

While the FRC Project may undertake an assessment of a wide range of scientific perspectives related to the role of high-severity fire in western coniferous forests from past discussions, the project will be 'forward looking,' meaning that its primary focus will be to identify shared scientific views. The central discussion will not be about the historical range of variation (HRV) in past fire regimes. The focus will instead be on areas of scientific agreement about how the HRV may/may not be fruitfully considered in the context of future uncertainty and climate change. Where particular issues under debate have the potential to inhibit informed planning and management decision-making in the future, the intent of the project is to address these issues through collaborative dialogue among participants; where reaching consensus is not possible, the FRC project may develop shared recommendations for further scientific research needed to resolve the issues in the short-to-medium term.

2.3 FRC Project Assumptions

- All those participating in dialogue through the FRC project are committed to respectful, collaborative engagement with one another.
- The range of interests to be involved in the FRC Project will be sufficient so as to ensure that effective implementation of project outputs is not hindered by a lack of support from key constituencies; the intent of the project is to ensure broad 'buy-in' from those currently involved in fire-related management discussions.
- Process transparency throughout the FRC Project is essential to ensure its credibility, and consistent efforts will be made to provide timely feedback to all those who provide input.
- While understanding the scope and nature of differing scientific perspectives may be necessary to a degree for informed dialogue among those involved, it is not anticipated that participants will revisit all scientific issues under debate, nor reach full agreement on all topics. As the FRC project moves forward, the precise scope of issues to be addressed through the collaborative dialogue will be determined. Moreover, the final Consensus Statement may also identify areas of agreement, other topics or issues where there is an 'agreement to disagree,' and may identify future research priorities.
- When considering divergent viewpoints reflected in published scientific literature, the FRC Project Steering Committee will adopt a 'balance, strength and weight of evidence' approach, and will endeavour to reflect this approach fairly and objectively in the preparation of written products. This approach will not preclude the acknowledgment of dissenting opinions where required.

3. Project Approach and Timelines

The FRC Project will be undertaken in a series of phases, as described in the sections below. Although it is expected that the implementation of some phases will overlap, the FRC project will be undertaken in a 'stage-gate' fashion, with a series of deadlines agree to meet interim milestones, and the Steering Committee's decision to proceed with any given phase of work subject to satisfactory completion of preceding phases. The Process Support Team will also undertake periodic evaluations of the process on behalf of the Steering Committee, to inform periodic adjustments in project timing and approach, as needed.

A diagram illustrating project phases 1-5 is included in Section 3.7. The anticipated timeline for the project is presented as Appendix B.

3.1 Phase 1: Project Design (Underway)

The objective of this phase of work is to secure agreement among all participants on the goals, scope, approach and timelines for the FRC Project.

Deliverables from the Project Design phase will include:

- Establishment of the FRC Project Steering Committee, to be comprised of qualified scientists and researchers who:
 - collectively reflect the diversity of scientific perspectives on the debate;
 - are capable of contributing in-depth knowledge of the literature, the research community, and the forests in each ecoregion to ensure comprehensive coverage across the western US; and,
 - are committed to the goals and approach for the FRC Project (see *Terms of Reference* for the Steering Committee, included as Appendix A).
- Establishment of the Project Support Team, as well as basic project management tools and information management approaches for use throughout the project;
- Steering Committee approval of the *Project Charter*;
- Development of a detailed workplan and Steering Committee approval;
- Confirmation of the budget for the FRC Project and funding support.

'Stakeholders' and 'Informants'

For the purposes of the FRC Project:

- 'Informants' will include qualified scientists and researchers in relevant fields who are invited to provide science-based perspectives on the specific issues under consideration through surveys or via other means.
- 'Stakeholders' include a broader constituency of groups and individuals who may have a variety of differing perspectives on the issues under consideration, and who share an interest in the broader implications of the *Consensus Statement* generated by the FRC Project.

The scope and timing of outreach and engagement with informants and stakeholders is described in each of the FRC Project phases.

Note that as of April 30, 2016, work to complete Phase 1 is well underway.

3.2 Phase 2: Issue identification & Analysis (Spring-Summer 2016)

The objectives of this phase of work are to (a) determine the precise scope of issues to be tackled by the FRC Project, (b) complete an initial assessment of the scope and nature of divergent science-based perspectives relative to these issues, based on input from Steering Committee members and other informants.

Deliverables from the Issue Identification and Analysis phase will include:

- Pooling of information from Steering Committee members to generate a preliminary list of issues to be addressed by the FRC Project, some of which may be unique to a particular region;
- Identification of criteria by which to determine the community of scientifically-qualified informants to be engaged in this phase of the FRC Project, the establishment of an agreed contact list, and as needed, the distribution of invitations to identified individuals to participate in the survey;
- Design of an online survey instrument, capable of soliciting both qualitative and quantitative data, to seek input from informants in the form of science-based perspectives on each of the key issues to be addressed by the FRC Project;
- Deployment of the survey instrument and compilation of results;
- Analysis of the survey results by topic area, and by region where relevant; and,
- Preparation of a summary of survey results, as the basis for further dialogue at the Steering Committee level, and in a form suitable for distribution to all survey participants to promote accountability.

Phase 2 may also involve in-person or virtual discussions among informants in one or more regions of the US or within particular groupings of research scientists, convened and led by (one or more) Steering

Committee members, and supported by the Process Support Team where possible. Written summaries of any such meetings or discussions will be prepared and provided to the Steering Committee to inform issue analysis.

It should also be noted that the survey is intended as a vehicle to solicit input in a semi-structured format from an identified list of informants, but is in no way intended as a poll. The interpretation of survey results will rely on considered deliberation that meets the test of academic rigour, and will not be determined simply based on the frequency of responses.

Phase 2 will also include notification of project status to all relevant informants and stakeholders, through targeted communications and via promotion through the NCEAS website, as well as other Steering Committee members' websites and social media channels, as appropriate. We will disseminate PI and steering committee approved messages.

3.3 Phase 3: Draft Consensus Statement (Fall 2016)

The objective of this phase of work is to generate a draft statement that reflects the common ground among leading scientists on the role of high-severity fire in western coniferous forests and other related issues, focusing on those topics that are most relevant to current and future planning and management decision-making. The draft *Consensus Statement* will also identify outstanding issues, and may propose research questions and underlying data sets that would be needed to resolve differences.

Deliverables from this phase of work include:

- One or more facilitated meetings of the Steering Committee, in person or by conference call, to engage in detailed discussions on issues identified in the summary of survey results from Phase 2;
- Development of a Table of Contents for the draft *Consensus Statement*; and,
- Preparation of a draft *Consensus Statement* by the Steering Committee.

3.4 Phase 4: Stakeholder Review of Draft Consensus Statement (Late 2016 – Early 2017)

The objective of this phase of work is to seek considered, constructive feedback on the draft *Consensus Statement* from stakeholders, including forest and fire managers, as well science and policy informants.

Deliverables from Phase 4 will include:

- Identification by the Steering Committee of target recipients who will be invited to review and provide feedback on the draft Consensus Statement, including (a) survey respondents ('informants') from Phase 2 and (b) selected other stakeholders who might offer commentary on the broader implications and application of the *Consensus Statement*, including land and fire managers, and policy experts;
- Determination by the Steering Committee of the preferred methodologies for soliciting feedback that achieve a balance between inclusion and manageability/costs, and which may include one or more of the following:
 - An invitation to all respondents to provide written comments on the draft;
 - A second, online survey, with structured questions related to specific aspects or sections of the draft;
 - Meetings with selected individuals or groups of informants or stakeholders, by region or by topic area, and convened by individual members of the Steering Committee with assistance from the Project Support Team; or,
 - Other methods.
- Preparation of cover materials to accompany the distribution of the draft *Consensus Statement*, as needed;
- Dissemination of the draft *Consensus Statement* on behalf by the Steering Committee, and tracking of feedback received from stakeholders and informants by the Process Support Team;
- Compilation of a detailed summary of feedback received, to inform further Steering Committee discussions in Phase 5; and,

- Preparation of a more concise summary of feedback received, and posting of this document on the NCEAS website to enable review by all interested parties. This summary may also include a summary of dissenting opinions and perspectives from stakeholders and any responses from the FRC Project Steering Committee.

3.5 Phase 5: Final Consensus Statement and Endorsements (Spring 2017)

The objective of this phase of work is to review feedback received during phase 4 and make further refinements to the *Consensus Statement* as needed so as to ensure broad constituency support for a final product that is scientifically-rigorous and that is of practical utility for informed planning and management decision-making now and in the future.

Deliverables from Phase 5 include the following:

- One or more facilitated meetings of the Steering Committee, in person or by conference call, to:
 - review feedback on the draft *Consensus Statement* and its implications;
 - reach agreement on further refinements to the *Consensus Statement* document, as needed;
 - identify research questions and data sets needed to resolve outstanding issues, if required;
 - determine preferred approaches for securing endorsements of FRC Project product(s) and for the dissemination/roll-out of product(s) from the FRC Project.
- Follow up by Steering Committee members with individual respondents where needed to clarify the nature of input received on the draft *Consensus Statement*, or to discuss proposed solutions to unresolved issues;
- Preparation of an *Implementation Plan*, for roll-out of FRC Project products and follow up discussions with relevant informants and stakeholders as needed;
- Preparation of a final version of the *Consensus Statement*, with collective authorship assigned to the FRC Project, and any other products as needed, in a form suitable for public distribution; and,
- Endorsements of FRC Project product(s) secured from key individuals and organizations, including all Steering Committee members.

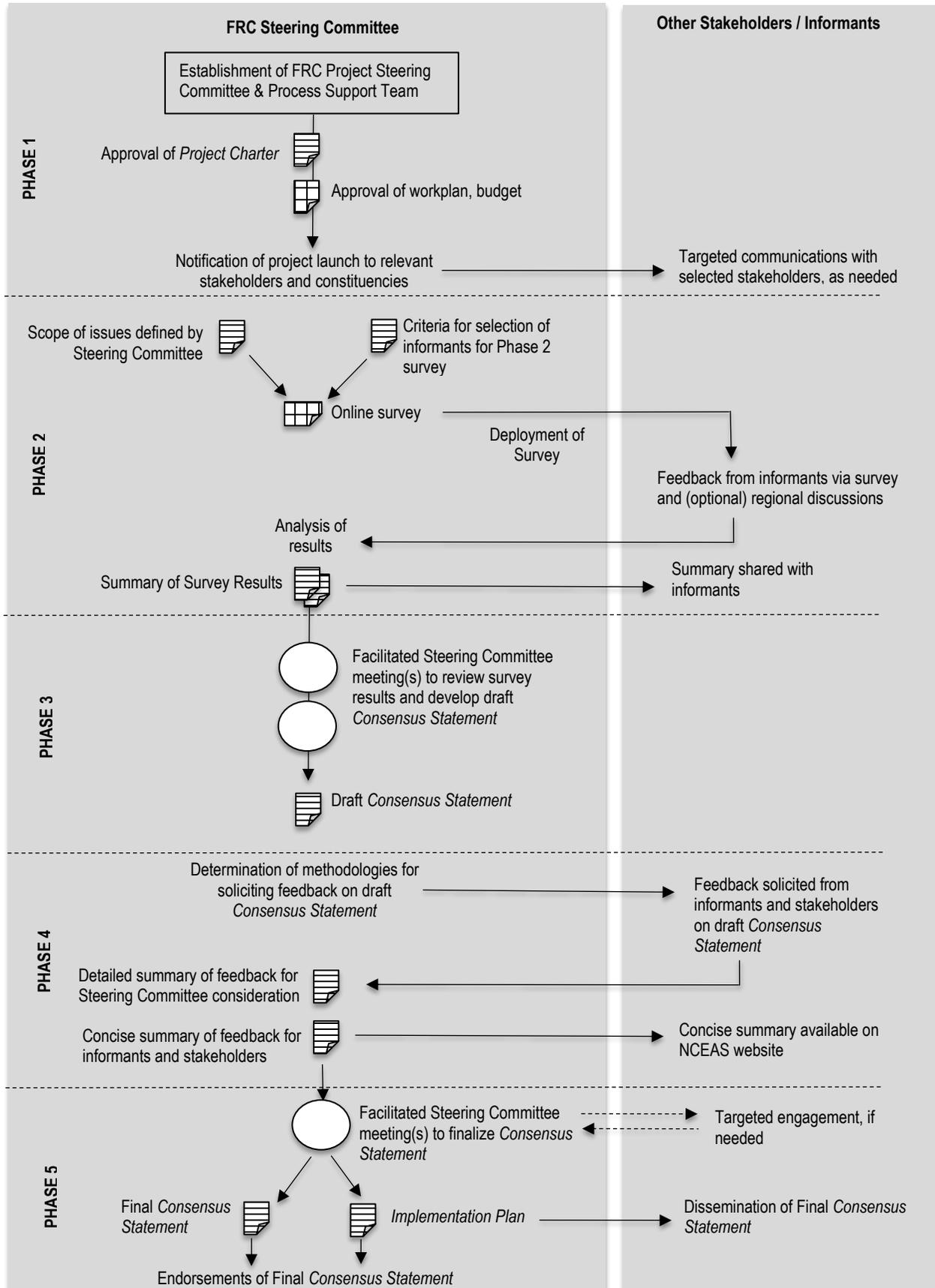
3.6 Phase 6: Roll-out and Implementation (Spring – Summer 2017)

The objective of the roll-out and implementation phase is to disseminate the *Consensus Statement* and any other FRC Project products so as to support informed planning and management decision-making.

The deliverables for this phase of work will be identified in the *Implementation Plan* developed at the conclusion of Phase 6, but are expected to include:

- Promotion of FRC Project outcomes and products via the NCEAS website, as well as other Steering Committee members' websites and social media channels;
- Preparation of articles related to the work of the FRC Project, for publication in the public media, academic journals, or via other platforms;
- Presentation of FRC Project products at conferences and workshops; and,
- One or more meetings of Steering Committee members with informants, representatives of relevant stakeholder groups and other constituencies.

3.7 Illustration of Project Phases 1-5



4. Project Budget

Attached [check]

Appendices

Appendix A: FRC Project Steering Committee Terms of Reference

Mandate

The mandate of the Fire Research Consensus (FRC) Project Steering Committee is to develop and lead a collaborative dialogue process to generate a consensus statement related to the role of high-severity fire in western coniferous forests that is supported by key constituencies and that is of practical utility for informed planning and management decision-making.

Structure and Composition

Composition

Members of the FRC Project Steering Committee include leading scientists in the fields of forest ecology and fire history who have indicated a willingness to contribute to this initiative. To ensure process efficiency and to facilitate constructive dialogue, the size of the FRC Project Steering Committee shall be no larger than 10 persons. The composition of the FRC Project Steering Committee is intended to reflect the diversity of science-based perspectives on the substantive issues at hand and include a mix of representatives from different regions/geographies.

All members of the FRC Project Steering Committee shall participate in good faith.

Co-Chairs

The Steering Committee is Co-Chaired by the two Principal Investigators for the FRC Project, Max Moritz (University of California, Berkeley) and Chris Topik (The Nature Conservancy).

Current Members

The Co-chairs are responsible for the appointment of founding members of the Steering Committee members, who shall include:

- Craig D. Allen, USGS, Jemez Mountains Field Station;
- Dennis Odion, University of California, Santa Barbara;
- Paul Hessburg, USFS, Pacific NW Research Station;
- Penny Morgan, University of Idaho, Moscow; and,
- Tom Veblen, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Additional Members

Where needed to supplement the relevant knowledge, experience and capabilities of the FRC Project Steering Committee, additional members may be appointed at any time by the Co-chairs, subject to majority support from among FRC Steering Committee members as a whole.

Any individual invited to join the FRC Project Steering Committee as an additional member must indicate their support for the Project Charter in writing as a condition of their membership.

Sub-Committees and Working Groups

At the discretion of the Co-Chairs, the FRC Project Steering Committee may establish various ad hoc working groups or sub-committees to undertake projects or initiatives on its behalf.

Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the FRC Project Steering Committee shall include:

- Approval of the Project Charter and these Terms of Reference, and periodic refinements of either document as needed;

- Oversight of all activities related to the implementation of the project, including the completion of deliverables outlined in the Project Charter for each phase of work and the work of the Process Support Team;
- Assistance with particular aspects of implementation of the FRC Project in various regions, including:
 - the identification of informants and stakeholders in a given region who may be invited to provide input during various phases of the project;
 - contributing specialized knowledge on the issues under consideration based on scientific research results in a given region;
 - interpretation of results from surveys or other information gathering methods used at various stages of the project, and the analysis of these results and information from a regional perspective (noting that all members of the steering committee will contribute to the syntheses of all regions); and,
- External communications related to the FRC Project, including liaison with stakeholders and constituencies.

Decision-Making

Decision-making for the FRC Project Steering Committee, including those decisions made within ad hoc working groups or sub-committees, shall be by consensus. For the FRC Project Steering Committee, consensus means no substantive disagreement on the issue at hand and a commitment to support the decision publicly without stated qualifications or reservations. Members of the FRC Project Steering Committee may have concerns about specific aspects of a consensus decision, but support proceeding on the basis of the agreement reached.

In seeking to achieve consensus on substantive issues, the FRC Project Steering Committee will use an 'interest-based approach.' For the purposes of the FRC Project Steering Committee, an interest-based approach is defined as working together to solve problems jointly, in a manner that:

- Uses tangible, desired outcomes as a starting point for discussions rather than ideological positions;
- Focuses on underlying interests rather than positions;
- Encourages creativity in the development of options to address the interests of those involved;
- Uses objective criteria to evaluate options;
- Recognizes that some things are, and some things are not, negotiable, and focuses on the former; and,
- Seeks to arrive at pragmatic, workable outcomes that accommodate rather than compromise the interests of those involved.

In the event that consensus cannot be achieved on matters of substance, the FRC Project Steering Committee will propose alternative decision-making approaches or steps, which may include one or more of the following:

- Referral of the issue to a sub-committee or working group for further discussion;
- Requesting the assistance of an impartial facilitator;
- Agreement to use a majority vote or other decision-making method, with communication to interested parties clarifying that the resulting decision does not have consensus support from all members.

Decisions on 'housekeeping items' such as scheduling Steering Committee meeting dates and locations will be made by the Co-Chairs of the FRC Project Steering Committee using a simple majority voting method, following consultation with members.

All members of the FRC Project Steering Committee recognize that the success of their collaborative efforts and the building of cooperative working relations will depend upon their ability and willingness to recognize, explore and resolve differences which arise between them.

Process Support Team

The work of the FRC Project Steering Committee shall be supported by a Process Support Team, appointed by the Co-Chairs, and comprised of:

- Process Facilitator; and where funds allow,
- Project Administrator; and,
- Research Assistant.

On a day-to-day basis, the Co-Chairs shall supervise the work of the Process Support Team.

Project Administrator

The responsibilities of the Project Administrator shall include:

- Logistical and scheduling support for meetings of the FRC Project Steering Committee;
- Management of records from the FRC Project Steering Committee process;
- Development and maintenance of a 'contact list' of all interested parties who wish to receive Progress Reports or other information related to the FRC Project;
- Assisting the Co-Chairs with the management of the project budget; and,
- Other duties assigned by the Co-Chairs.

Process Facilitator

The responsibilities of the Process Facilitator shall include:

- Preparation of the Project Charter and periodic refinements to this document under the direction of the FRC Project Steering Committee;
- Providing advice to the FRC Project Steering Committee on methods for engagement with stakeholders and key constituencies;
- Design of agendas for meetings of the FRC Project Steering Committee, in consultation with members;
- Impartial facilitation of FRC Project Steering Committee meetings and conference calls as needed;
- Preparation of written summaries from FRC Project Steering Committee meetings;
- Assisting the FRC Project Steering Committee with periodic evaluations of progress during various phases of the project and results achieved; and,
- Other duties assigned by the Co-Chairs.

Research Assistant

The responsibilities of the Research Assistant shall include:

- Assistance with the compilation of background information related to the role of high-severity fire in western coniferous forests from peer-reviewed scientific journals, grey literature or other sources;
- Assistance with the preparation of tools to solicit input from FRC Project Steering Committee members or other informants, such as survey instruments or questionnaires;
- Preparation of written summaries and analyses of information gathered through surveys or via other methods, to inform deliberations of the FRC Project Steering Committee; and
- Other duties assigned by the Co-Chairs.

Coordination of Meetings

Scheduling and Notifications

A schedule of FRC Project Steering Committee meetings and conference calls shall be included in the approved project workplan. The timing and location of meetings shall be determined jointly by the Co-Chairs, in consultation with other members.

The Co-Chairs will endeavour to provide notice of meetings to all FRC Project Steering Committee members not less than 3 weeks in advance, and circulate agenda materials and all background documentation for meetings not less than 1 week in advance.

With the assistance of the Process Facilitator, the FRC Project Steering Committee may also establish groundrules to guide the conduct of meetings and other interactions.

Meeting Records

The FRC Project Steering Committee Co-Chairs shall maintain an accurate record of all meetings, including issues discussed, the various perspectives offered by members, and decisions reached. Such records shall be distributed to all members of the FRC Project Steering Committee on a timely basis.

Observers & Invited Guests

Members may bring technical support staff or guests to attend meetings of the FRC Project Steering Committee only with approval in advance from the Co-Chairs.

The Steering Committee may agree to open specific meetings to observers.

The Co-Chairs may invite guests with specialized knowledge or expertise to make presentations to the FRC Project Steering Committee.

Any technical support, guests or observers that are invited to attend meetings of the FRC Project Steering Committee may not participate in discussions unless invited to do so by the Co-Chairs.

Individuals who are not members shall not participate in FRC Project Steering Committee decision-making.

External Communications

Unless otherwise agreed by the Steering Committee, summary information regarding the membership of the FRC Project Steering Committee, the general scope of its activities, and any final products or final recommendations it generates by consensus shall be publicly available.

Project Progress Reports will also be prepared by the Co-Chairs, and made available to all interested parties included on the project contact list and via the project website.

Detailed notes from FRC Project Steering Committee meetings and correspondence among members shall not be shared with external parties.

All members of the FRC Project Steering Committee shall strive to ensure that public communications respecting the activities of the FRC Project Steering Committee will be undertaken in a coordinated manner. FRC Project Steering Committee members agree to refrain from public criticism of the FRC Project or other actions that might undermine the good faith efforts of those involved.

The Co-Chairs will assume ultimate responsibility for all public communications on behalf of the FRC Project Steering Committee, and may request the assistance of other members as needed.

Amendment of Terms of Reference

These *Terms of Reference* may be amended by the FRC Project Steering Committee, with the assistance of the Process Facilitator.

Approval

These Terms of Reference are hereby approved by all Founding Members of the FRC Project Steering Committee on May 6, 2016.

Signed and approved:

—

Max Moritz, University of California, Berkeley

Chris Topik, The Nature Conservancy

Craig D. Allen, USGS, Jemez Mountains Field Station

Dennis Odion, University of California, Santa Barbara

Paul Hessburg, USFS, Pacific NW Research Station

Penny Morgan, University of Idaho, Moscow

Tom Veblen, University of Colorado, Boulder

Appendix B: Summary of Project Timeline

Phase	2016									2017						
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	Summer-Fall
1. Project Design																
2. Issue identification & Analysis																
3. Draft Consensus Statement																
4. Stakeholder Review of Draft Consensus Statement																
5. Final Consensus Statement and Endorsements																
6. Roll-out and Implementation																