

# Eel River Native Plant Network

## Orientation Session Takeaways

March 18, 2026

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*This document summarizes input gathered from network members during the Orientation Session on March 18, 2026. It is intended to inform how the network's goal and scope are refined, how in-person gatherings are designed, how the network plans to organize itself over time, and to serve as an artifact of the network's startup.*

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## About the Session

On March 18, 2026, 74 network members gathered on Zoom for the first time as the Eel River Native Plant Network. The session was designed to orient people to the network's origin, intent, and timeline, build early connections across the group, gather feedback on the draft goal, and surface what members most hope for — and need — from this collaboration. It also served as a preview of the June in-person session in Fortuna.

## Who Was in the Room

The diversity of participants on March 18 reflected the breadth of this effort. Network members came from Tribal Nations, federal and state agencies, nonprofits, restoration practitioners, and plant material producers. If your organization was present and not listed below, we apologize. Please reach out to Alicia so we can correct the record!

**Tribal Nations and Organizations:** Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria, Blue Lake Rancheria, Cahto Tribe, Hopland Band of Pomo Indians, Potter Valley Tribe, Round Valley Indian Tribes, Shabaldano Kai / Sherwood Valley Tribal Historic Preservation Office, Wiyot Tribe, Yurok Tribe, Tribal EcoRestoration Alliance, and Save California Salmon.

**Federal and State Agencies:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service (Mendocino National Forest and Six Rivers National Forest), California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Parks – North Coast Redwoods District, and Great Redwood Trail Agency.

**Conservancies, Advocacy Organizations, and other Nonprofits:** Friends of the Eel River, Friends of the Lost Coast, Mattole Restoration Council, Salmonid Restoration Federation, Sierra Club Redwood Chapter, The Wildlands Conservancy, ROAR (Revitalizing Opportunities for the Alderpoint Region), Redwood Forest Foundation, Pathways of Purpose, and Cannabis for Conservation.

**Restoration Practitioners, Consultants, and Corporations:** Applied River Sciences, Native Ecosystems Inc., Mainspring Consulting, Root Wisdom, Heritage Growers, independent restoration and botanical consultants, and Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E).

**The network's Stewardship Team** — the group guiding this process of formation — includes members drawn from across the network's constituencies: John Bair, Applied River Sciences; Caroline Martorano, (former) California Native Plant Society; Adam Canter, Wiyot Tribe; Alicia Hamann and Julie Weeder, Friends of the Eel

River; Joshua Chenoweth, Yurok Tribe; Troy Perez, Samara Restoration; and alternating staff members of Round Valley Indian Tribes.

Friends of the Eel River is serving as the **backbone organization** for the network's startup, providing coordination and administrative support as the network gets off the ground. CoCreative team members, Heather Equinoss and Maricela Aceves Wexler, are assisting with network development and providing facilitation support.

## Values That Animate This Network

Early in the session, network members were asked to share one value that consistently informs their life and work. Here is what came back:

Community · Stewardship · Biodiversity · Reciprocity · Sustainability · Culture · Dedication · Curiosity · Joy · Resilience · Transparency · Localism · Diversity · Caring · Conservation · Mindfulness · Honesty · Harmony · Family · Collaboration · Food · Fish · Paying It Forward · How to Uplift Our Youth · Supporting Biodiversity · Adventure



Ecological values showed up strongly — biodiversity, stewardship, conservation, localism — and so did relational and cultural ones: community, reciprocity, culture, family, and how to uplift our youth. Joy appeared twice. This is a group that approaches restoration work from many angles, and that breadth showed throughout the session.

## Draft Network Goal — Feedback

The draft goal presented to network members was:

*"Connect plant material producers and restoration practitioners to sustain and increase regional native plant material diversity and production capacity for meeting Eel River watershed ecosystem restoration demand."*

Network members responded to three prompts via MeetingPulse and could upvote responses that resonated with them.

## What resonates?

The most upvoted responses clustered around a few ideas.

**The goal's emphasis on regionally sourced, locally native plant material drew the strongest response.** Members appreciated that the goal keeps production rooted in the watershed and tied to appropriate genetics. Closely behind that, members upvoted a focus on increasing the diversity of plant species available for restoration of the Eel River, not just increasing the volume of plant material.

**The idea of a decentralized, non-extractive network model also drew significant support.** Members were energized by the notion of distributing capacity broadly rather than concentrating it in one institution, and several noted that connecting players who haven't historically worked together could produce something greater than any of them could do alone.

**Other ideas that came up:** eliminating barriers to accessing restoration materials, building viable seed banks, understanding baseline vegetation to inform collections, and the network's potential to support local and sustainable green economies. One member flagged that climate resilience should factor into the goal's framing.

## What would make the goal more compelling or energizing?

The most consistent feedback, and the most strongly upvoted, was **a call to more explicitly center Tribal stewardship and sovereignty, and Indigenous food and cultural self-determination.** Members felt the current language is technically accurate but doesn't go far enough; several wanted the goal to center on the restoration of Indigenous agroforests and landscapes, not just plant production capacity.

**Adding cultural and food uses of native plants** was the second most upvoted suggestion, reinforcing that theme.

Other suggestions that came up:

- Create pathways for young people and local youth in restoration and the sciences — the right livelihood opportunities, not just jobs.
- Make it explicit that local rural economies, and the Eel River Basin in particular, are direct beneficiaries of the network's work.
- Shift the language of "plant material producers" toward something that feels more rooted in stewardship.
- Make clearer that native plant diversity supports native ecosystems broadly, not just restoration targets.
- Add a timeframe.
- Reference the community-based, intergenerational nature of the work.
- Name knowledge-sharing as an explicit function of the network.

One member noted the current language "sounds just slightly sterile" — a useful signal that the goal may need to do more emotional and relational work alongside its technical framing.

## Feedback on the initial scoping dimensions

Alongside the goal, members were presented with a draft focus and frame. The focus describes what the network anticipates working on in the near term. The frame captures things the network wants to keep in view that don't actively drive the current work — larger-scale efforts and longer-horizon restoration work that provide important context for the focused work. Both were developed based on early conversations with people across the region and are **intended as a starting point, not a final answer**.

	INITIAL FOCUS (DRAFT) <i>What we anticipate being an early focus of our work.</i>		FRAME: <i>We're not actively working on these things, but we want to keep in view as we work toward our focus.</i>
Geographic Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eel River watershed ecosystem restoration</li> </ul>	&	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State and national native plant initiatives</li> </ul>
Possible areas of work, efforts, or initiatives, based on early conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying and collecting diverse native seed sources</li> <li>Increasing small-scale amplification facilities and rooted plant production (bare root and container plants)</li> <li>Seed cleaning and storage capacity</li> <li>Forecasting plant material needs</li> <li>Tracking data over time</li> <li>Developing, adopting, and implementing best management practices</li> </ul>	&	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large-scale seed production (e.g., 250K lbs seed demand for revegetation of the PVP reservoir footprints)</li> <li>PG&amp;E's Restoration Plan for the Potter Valley Project</li> </ul>
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The next five years, preparing for dam removal</li> </ul>	&	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generational, serving restoration projects and food sovereignty goals long into the future</li> </ul>

Fewer members responded to this prompt than to the goal statement, but the responses raised important points.

One member urged that the scoping dimensions **explicitly protect the sovereignty of seeds and plant relatives, and that the network be deliberate about not operating under an extractive or exploitative model of native plant populations** — doing this work "in a Good Way."

**Members also asked for a clearer geographic definition.** Several wanted to know whether the geographic scope extends to the full watershed and all tributaries, or just the main stem. (One member clarified in the chat that "the entire basin, tributaries and all — and a bit beyond" is the intent.)

**Fire mitigation and climate resilience** were named as dimensions that should be explicitly in the network frame, with diverse native plants recognized as a tool for landscape-level climate adaptation.

Members also raised **the value of building shared knowledge infrastructure** — GIS files, documentation, shared databases, reports — as part of what the network produces. A shared GIS mapping platform was specifically suggested.

## Highest Hopes for Our Work Together

Network members were asked to share their highest hope for the work in small group conversations and report back key ideas in the Zoom chat. Several strong themes came through.

**A thriving, self-sustaining ecosystem.** Members expressed hope for a restored Eel River watershed where native plant communities eventually sustain themselves — a lakebed and riparian corridor full of native species, with biodiversity restored at a scale that supports wildlife, including migratory and endangered species, elk, and butterflies. Several pointed to the Klamath River dam removal as an inspiring precedent and expressed hope that the Eel River dam removal could become another successful model.

**Abundance and readiness of native plant materials.** A recurring hope was that the network would produce large quantities of diverse, locally sourced, and culturally significant plant materials in time for dam removal and well into the future. Decentralized seed banks and locally grown material came up repeatedly, so that restoration efforts are never limited by supply and plants used are adapted to local conditions.

**Tribal stewardship, land return, and self-determination.** Several members shared hopes that went well beyond revegetation to encompass long-term Tribal stewardship frameworks, including land access, MOUs, and land return. Support for native plant nurseries on Tribal lands was named as a concrete way the network could strengthen the capacity and self-determination of Tribal Nations.

**Knowledge transfer across generations.** Members expressed hope that the knowledge generated through this network would be preserved and passed on to future generations, including to Tribal Nations who will continue this work, and to other restoration efforts across the region. Several named the importance of honoring those who came before and ensuring that what's learned here is not lost.

**A replicable model.** Several members hoped this effort would become a carefully documented model that other projects and Tribal Nations could draw from in the future.

**Local jobs and economic opportunity.** Workforce development, local hiring, and economic sustainability — particularly for Tribal members — came up across multiple responses. Members saw this network as an opportunity to build skills, create jobs, and support a local economy grounded in ecological restoration.

## What Needs to Be True

Members were asked what would need to be true for this work to be meaningful and impactful for them. These conditions are intended to directly inform how gatherings are designed and how the network functions over time.

**Resources to participate.** Members were clear that meaningful engagement requires funding and capacity support. Smaller organizations, especially Tribal offices and community groups, need funding to contribute their time, expertise, and plant material. Without this, sustained participation will be difficult.

**A genuinely collaborative, open network.** Openness and collaboration were named consistently. Members want a network that draws on a wide range of expertise, not one where any single organization sets the agenda, and creates opportunities for knowledge-sharing, cross-cultural exchange, and mutual support.

**Locally sourced, genetically appropriate plant material.** To maintain ecological integrity, plant material needs to be locally sourced, genetically appropriate to the watershed, and free of pathogens.

**Ongoing invasive species management.** Prevention of contamination with invasive seeds at the seed amplification stage must be planned for. Further, restoration cannot be "set it and forget it.", because invasive species will be an ongoing concern. Managing invasive species over time needs to be built into the network's work from the start.

**Cultural fire as a long-term stewardship framework.** Fire mitigation was named as an important dimension, and several members were specific that this should include cultural fire practices, not simply hazard reduction.

**Clear structure and a bias toward action.** Members want organized, action-oriented work: plans with goals, tasks, working groups, and timelines that keep things moving. Several noted the importance of producing tangible outcomes in Year 1.

**Metrics grounded in biodiversity and benefits to wildlife.** Multiple members called for a shared framework for tracking success. This should include plant production numbers, but also capture biodiversity outcomes and impacts on migratory, threatened, and endangered species. Several suggested anchoring this in metrics that make sense to the broader scientific community.

**Honest engagement with political and funding realities.** The network's plans need to account for current and forecasted constraints on funding and other resources. Pragmatic thinking about sustainability will matter.

**Community engagement and local opportunity.** The network should create genuine opportunities for local community members, particularly Tribal members. These should include education, job skills, and meaningful involvement in decision-making and implementation.

## Preparing for our Network Launch In June

The goal, and focus/frame will be revised based on feedback from the orientation session, and at the June meeting the network will weigh in on revised versions. What members shared about hopes and needs will shape how the June gathering and future sessions are designed, and how we collectively organize the work of the network.

Between now and then, a few efforts are underway. Friends of the Eel River will continue to have 1:1 conversations to learn more about the work of specific members through April 2026. Interested people should contact Alicia to schedule such a conversation. Network members will also receive a survey to help us develop a clearer picture of current regional plant material production capacity. Data from the survey will help us compare what we know about restoration needs for the revegetation of the PVP reservoir footprints against what the region can currently produce, which will show us where the gaps are.

The June 18 gathering is still in design mode, and members' input from the orientation session is actively shaping it. What we know so far is that the day will include: deepening connections across the group, considering a revised goal and focus/frame, walking through John Bair's assessment of plant material need, and hearing from Friends of the Eel River on what they've learned through their interviews with network

members, particularly what it implies about where the network could focus our work. Throughout, there will be ample structured time for members to share their own knowledge, experience, and perspective. The design will continue to evolve as we learn more from 1:1 conversations through April, and consult with the Stewardship Team between now and June.

For anyone who can't make it to the June in-person meeting, you can attend a virtual report-out on June 23 designed to keep you in the loop.

**Before June, we're asking network participants to:**

- Respond to the email invitation to the June 18 meeting from Friends of the Eel River, and contact Alicia to schedule a 1:1 conversation if you are interested.
- Complete the plant material production survey when it arrives in your inbox.
- Reach out to Alicia Hamann at [alicia@eelriver.org](mailto:alicia@eelriver.org) with any questions in the meantime.

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*Document prepared by CoCreative, March 27, 2026.*