

Bill to raise funds to fight pollution dies

It would have raised vehicle registration fees to pay for anti-pollution programs.

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau
Fresno Bee, Saturday, Sept. 1, 2007

SACRAMENTO -- A Valley state senator was thwarted this week in his effort to raise vehicle registration fees to pay for anti-pollution programs -- a defeat that air officials say could hurt efforts to clean the region's notoriously dirty air.

Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, had hoped to give the Valley air district new authority to raise fees by \$30. Senate Bill 240 failed to move out of the Assembly Appropriations Committee, despite support from environmentalists and farm groups -- two constituencies often at odds.

"I was literally shocked and just completely dumbfounded by the action of the Assembly Appropriations Committee, because everybody supports it now," said Florez, who plans to pursue the proposal again next year.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District viewed the bill as a key part of its plan to meet federal clean-air standards.

The district hopes to raise about \$200 million a year for clean-air programs, and SB 240 "definitely would have been a step in the right direction to raise that revenue," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "It's really crucial for the Valley, given our near state of emergency that we have with respect to air pollution."

Under the bill, the district could have increased the amount it collects on annual vehicle fees from \$7 to \$37 per car registered in the Valley. Sadredin said the district's governing board was poised to adopt at least some of the increase. If the full \$30 increase was implemented, the district would have gained an additional \$78 million a year by 2009-10, according to estimates.

The district and farm groups originally opposed the bill because it was tied to a separate bill that would force the district to reshuffle its governing board by, among other things, adding two seats for medical experts.

An earlier version of SB 240 also would have allowed the district to increase fees on stationary pollution sources -- an idea farm leaders don't like.

Florez reduced the opposition by dropping the two provisions, though the air district board restructuring bill -- SB 719 -- is still alive as a stand-alone bill in the Assembly.

The Nisei Farmers League in Fresno -- a frequent opponent of Florez's bills -- supported SB 240 in its final version because it spread the cost of cleaning the air to all drivers, instead of just businesses, said Manuel Cunha Jr., president of the league.

But in the end, SB 240 appeared to fall victim to political gamesmanship between the Legislature's two houses.

"There's some sort of internal war going on between the Assembly and the Senate," Florez said.

Assembly Member Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, said he agreed with the bill's goals but decided to hold it in committee without a vote because similar bills dealing with fees had been held in the Senate.

"There's no reason why one part of the state or one legislator should be treated special; that would be unfair," he said.

He pointed to several bills that were held in the Senate, including one of his own: AB 1590, which would have allowed San Francisco officials to adopt a ballot measure that would have imposed a vehicle license fee on city residents for general revenue purposes.

Alicia Trost, a spokeswoman for Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, said the Senate held Leno's bill and others like it because Perata wants to "have a larger discussion in the fall" on the appropriate way to raise general revenues.

But she said that the policy did not apply to Florez's bill, because the fee was for a specific purpose.

Florez plans to bring the bill up again in January. Now that it has strong support, he hopes to add an urgency clause to make it take effect in early 2008.

In other action this week, the Assembly Appropriations Committee approved a bill to allow drivers of smog-belching cars to replace their cars with donated vehicles. SB 23, by Sen. Dave Cogdill, R-Modesto, has a goal of replacing 200 gross-polluting cars in the San Joaquin Valley. Under the plan, residents whose cars fail the state smog check could apply for a car donated by someone else. Priority would be given to low-income residents.

The bill must still pass the full Assembly and would not go into effect unless the Legislature approves and Gov. Schwarzenegger signs SB 719, the air district board expansion bill. The link to SB 719 was inserted by Democrats over the objections of Cogdill.

Environmentalists support SB 719 because they say new voices are needed on the air district board, which has been criticized for delaying the date by which the Valley must meet federal clean air standards. The extension to 2024 -- more than a decade beyond the initial deadline set by the federal government -- was approved earlier this year.

Cogdill agrees with farm groups that say the current board make-up is fine the way it is.

Air district's findings 'biased,' professor says

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Sept. 1, 2007

The regional air district is using fuzzy math to calculate air quality improvements in the San Joaquin Valley, according to a Kern County resident and distinguished professor of statistics at UCLA.

Jan de Leeuw, of Cuddy Valley, analyzed about 20 years of air quality data for the greater Bakersfield area. He said the results show that improvements in air quality aren't as great as the district claims.

"The district is giving a biased picture of what's actually going on," de Leeuw said. "The public should know what is really going on."

De Leeuw also said during a recent meeting to discuss his findings that the district admitted a dirty secret about clean air: Cutting pollution in urban areas, like Bakersfield, isn't that helpful in the short term for downwind communities, like Arvin.

Downwind communities do benefit, just not as much, countered Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the agency charged with cleaning the valley's air. That's the natural progression of cleaning up the air, he said.

As for De Leeuw's calculations, Sadredin said the professor's analysis is based in sound mathematics. But additional factors must be considered when measuring air quality improvements.

"He was looking at this purely as a statistical exercise," Sadredin said. "But you need to consider more than that when you look at air quality."

Numbers game

The air district has said that smog violations in the valley have improved by 80 percent.

But de Leeuw's research showed the general reduction in Arvin, Bakersfield and Shafter was more like 25 percent.

Different calculations were used to reach those numbers and the data weren't the same.

De Leeuw calculated numbers based on yearly data for each year going back in some cases to the 1980s. Progress toward cleaner air was determined by the average change over the course of that time period.

Meanwhile, the district calculated improvement using a three-year rolling average. Both calculations factored in weather patterns, but the air district also factors in chemical changes caused by the reduction in the amounts of various smog-forming compounds in the air.

"What impacts our air quality is weather, the quantity of various constituents and the reaction of these various constituents," Sadredin said.

Furthermore, the comparison wasn't apples to apples. The district used air quality data from throughout the entire San Joaquin Valley to determine the average improvement. De Leeuw's research focused on local areas because "no one is breathing average air," he said.

Cleaner here, not there

During the course of presenting his findings to the district, de Leeuw said he was given an explanation of chemical factors involved in air quality. That was when air district staff said that cutting pollution in Bakersfield would temporarily make air worse in downwind areas, such as Arvin.

That information alarmed Brent Newell, an attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment. The group has been active in helping Arvin residents organize and demand cleaner air.

"If unequal burdens (of pollution) are being born by the less powerful and less affluent and by people of color, then there's significant environmental racism present," Newell said.

Sadredin said it's not intentional that Arvin sees less pollution reduction than Bakersfield.

Pollution is caused in urban areas. So when pollution is reduced, it happens in the urban area first, he said.

When this happens, a chemical phenomena known as ozone scavenging creates more smog in the downwind area than would be expected.

That explains, in part, why Bakersfield has exceeded the smog violation on about eight days this year while Arvin has done so on about 30, Sadredin said.

"It's not that (Arvin's) air quality is getting worse," he said, "it's just not getting better as fast as it is in Bakersfield."

Overall, air quality is improving, he said. The smog season is nearly over and Arvin is having one of its best years with 30 violations.

Last year, it had 61 violations and in 2003 and 2004, it had more than 100.

Bad air day? Check the flag

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Monday, Sept. 3, 2007

Green is good. Red is unhealthy. That's what Kings County officials would like school kids and residents to remember when checking for daily air quality. On a bad air day, a red, purple or deep purple flag will fly over the schoolyard. On a good day, the flag will be green or yellow.

"It tells you how to identify different air pollution forecasts with color," said Gloria Arredondo-Malarchick, a public health nurse at the Kings County Health Department.

In other words, the flags identify what associated health effects might be a concern for people, she said.

Soon, these visual communicators will be used on school grounds and in the community to keep people aware of the daily air quality conditions, thanks to a partnership advocating for respiratory health.

The new air pollution flag program is a new initiative of the Kings County Health Department to protect residents from prolonged air pollution exposure on bad air days.

Kings County is the first in the state to launch such a program.

"We're very excited about this because it will help people take steps in advance," Arredondo-Malarchick said. "Air pollution can harm anyone, but it can be dangerous for people who have respiratory conditions or heart conditions. Air pollution can also trigger asthma, most frequently among children."

The flag program follows the color coding of the air quality index, a measure of pollution levels issued daily by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The AQI is divided into six categories:

- AQI 0-50 Good (Green)
- AQI 51-100 Moderate (Yellow)
- AQI 101-150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups (Orange)
- AQI 151-200 Unhealthy (Red)
- AQI 201-300 Very unhealthy (Purple)
- AQI Hazardous (Deep Purple)

The Kings County Department of Public Health will hold a training on air quality for the community on Thursday, as it marks the launch of the flag program.

The event will take place at the health department, 330 Campus Drive, Hanford, starting at 8:30 a.m.

The training is expected to cover the overview of the flag program, and will include presentations by experts from the American Lung Association as well as Hanford physician Dr. Michael Gage.

In the meantime, real-time air pollution information is available by visiting the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Web site at www.valleyair.org or by calling 1-800-SMOG-INFO.

For information regarding Thursday's event, call Arredondo-Malarchick at 584-1411, ext. 4527.

Senate OKs buffer zone around Allensworth

By Jake Henshaw, Sacramento Bureau

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, Aug. 31, 2007

SACRAMENTO — With no debate, the Senate Thursday approved a bill to create a protective buffer zone around the Col. Allensworth State Historic Park.

Senators voted 23-14 to pass Assembly Bill 576, which would establish a 2 1/2 mile protective zone around the park, a step backers said is necessary to protect the park from possible odors, flies and water pollution from a proposed 12,000-cow dairy operation.

"I am pleased to stand before you to say this is a historic opportunity for us to celebrate this park in its centennial next year," Sen. Mark Ridley-Thomas, D-Los Angeles, said.

The bill was supported by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter.

"I'm not a fan of dairies being located where people live or public places where people have activities," Florez said, noting that in 2003 he proposed a 3-mile buffer to keep dairies away from schools and urban areas. "So the Allensworth [bill] makes sense to me," he said.

But Sen. Roy Ashburn, R-Bakersfield, who commented outside the formal floor consideration, said this should be a local decision.

"I certainly respect the point of view of those who propose it," he said of the buffer zone. "But I don't think the state should butt in and pass a bill saying there's an arbitrary 2 1/2-mile [buffer within which] you can't build a dairy."

The bill has been opposed by the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, which approved the dairy project, and a coalition of Tulare County organizations that include:

- Tulare County Economic Development Corporation
- Tulare County Farm Bureau
- Visalia Chamber of Commerce
- Porterville Chamber of Commerce

- Tulare Chamber of Commerce
- Home Builders Association of Tulare/Kings Counties Inc.

The bill now returns to the Assembly for a final vote. If it passes that vote, the bill then will go to the governor. The park was established in 1976 to preserve the town founded in 1908 by Col. Allensworth, a African-American Civil War veteran, for African Americans. Supervisors on March 20 approved the special-use permit and the environmental impact report that would allow Visalia rancher Sam Etchegaray to build the dairies, which would house more than 12,000 cows.

The vote disappointed park supporters from the Bay Area and Los Angeles, who claim that the proposed dairies would bring unwanted flies, dust and odor to the park and eventually destroy it.

Beyond AB576, the campaign to protect the park also has included lawsuits and negotiations between David Albers, Etchegaray's attorney, and The Trust for Public Land, California, a land conservation group.

The Trust for Public Land is working on buying a portion of the rancher's property or buying dairy development rights for the land, which would create a buffer zone between Etchegaray's remaining property and the park.

Nicole Lampe, public affairs manager for The Trust for Public Land, said a third-party appraiser has placed a price on the land and the dairy development rights. Neither Lampe nor Albers would disclose the appraisal value or when negotiations would be final.

"It could be two weeks or two months," Lampe said.

Air quality forecast: Unhealthy for sensitive groups

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, Sept. 1, 2007

The air-quality forecast for today and Sunday in Tulare County falls into the unhealthy category for sensitive groups, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reported.

People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, officials say.

Biodiesel facility under way

Legislation may boost market for plant's product

BY STACEY SHEPARD, California staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Aug. 31, 2007

A local oil and gas producer is venturing into the alternative fuels arena.

A biodiesel plant is being built near Interstate 5 and Old River Road by Crimson Renewable Energy, a limited property of Crimson Resource Management.

Crimson Resource Management operates oil and gas production assets locally and also owns the former Chevron natural gas processing plant in Taft.

Crimson Renewable Energy was formed by the company to develop and operate renewable energy production facilities.

The local biodiesel plant will be its first. Construction recently got under way and is expected to be complete this spring. It will have the capacity to produce 30 million gallons of biodiesel a year.

Current statewide production capacity is about 20 million gallons, according to the National Biodiesel Board.

"I think we've turned the corner on this issue as a country, politically and socially," said Harry Simpson, president of Crimson Renewable Energy. "We think renewable energy is going to be an increasingly growing part of the energy landscape."

Bringing in oil

Soybean oil from the Midwest will be brought in by train to produce 100 percent biodiesel at the plant. However, the company may switch to regionally made feedstocks like canola and mustard seed oils in the future. The facility can handle virgin vegetable oils and animal fats.

Since March, Crimson Renewable Energy has supplied biodiesel produced out-of-state to regional distributors. Its customers include Fleet Card Fuels, a Bakersfield-based regional fueling company, which now offers biodiesel at the pump at its Kimber Avenue fueling station.

California's biodiesel production and demand is relatively low compared to other parts of the country, such as the Midwest. But several factors could help that market grow in the next few years. Legislation is under way to require diesel sold in the state to contain 2 percent biodiesel.

That alone would boost demand in the state to almost 80 million gallons a year, Simpson said. State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, has also introduced a series of bills that would provide tax incentives for biodiesel production, encourage the use of biodiesel in school buses and government vehicles and require engine manufacturers to make warranties good for fuel that contains up to 20 percent biodiesel.

Studies on biodiesel

But not everyone is sold on the alternative fuel.

Critics say studies have shown the fuel emits more smog-forming nitrogen oxides than petroleum fuels. However, proponents, including Crimson, point to more recent studies showing those emissions are about the same.

The California Air Resources Board is studying biodiesel emissions and will start drafting regulations for the fuel in the near future, said California Air Resources Board spokeswoman Gennet Paauwe.

Crimson will also refine crude glycerin -- a byproduct of the biodiesel production -- into a pharmaceutical-grade product at the local plant. Glycerin is used in a variety of consumer products, including soap and shampoo, Simpson said. To do so, the company will invest in costlier stainless steel equipment and obtain U.S. Food and Drug Administration certification.

"We wanted to make this, as much as possible, a closed-loop facility," Simpson said. "That's part of the philosophy of what we were trying to accomplish on an environmental level."

The company is also in the testing phase for another facility that would convert waste biomass, such as cow manure, into natural gas.

Kickoff times pushed back due to heat

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Aug. 31, 2007
Californian staff report

High temperatures and fear for athletes' safety led the CIF Central Section to recommend high school practices and games start no earlier than 6 p.m. this weekend.

On Thursday, the Kern High School District acted on that recommendation by moving back tonight's football games. Varsity matchups are anticipated to begin at 8:15-8:30.

In addition, practices for all outdoor sports and indoor sports at un-air conditioned venues could not begin before 6 starting Thursday. That stipulation will remain in place until Saturday.

"We just make recommendations, and it's up to the school districts to make the decision," Central Section commissioner Jim Crichlow said.

Thursday's frosh-soph football games were pushed back from 5 p.m. to 7. Friday's junior varsity games will begin at 6:30. The games will be shortened from 10 to 8 minute quarters, and the time between JV and varsity games will be shortened from 30 to 15 minutes.

After receiving information from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the section made its recommendation. Friday's forecast calls for an air quality index of 142, which is unhealthy for sensitive groups. Air quality is considered unhealthy for all groups at 150.

Did you know?

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Sept. 4, 2007

Kern County has one of the worst smog problems in the country. Nearly 80 percent of the problem is caused by tailpipe emissions from cars, trucks, tractors, construction equipment and trains.

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Summer slipping away with a sizzle

News-Sentinel Staff

Lodi News-Sentinel, Saturday, Sept. 1, 2007

Temperatures have crept past 100 degrees in recent days and the short-term forecast calls for hot weather through the weekend.

The California Independent System Operator Corporation, or Cal-ISO, an independent agency that monitors the state's power grid expressed "its sincere gratitude" to California residents Thursday. Enough residents curtailed their energy to avert a "stage 2" power emergency. Such an emergency would have required power outages.

Cal-ISO asked residents to conserve energy again Friday.

Energy conservation

- Set thermostat at 78 degrees or higher.
- Cool with fans.
- Draw the drapes.
- Turn off unnecessary lights and appliances.
- Use big appliances in early morning or late at night.

Highs and lows

Sick of the heat? Perhaps you would have enjoyed a day in Deadhorse, Alaska where the low was 34 degrees — making it the coldest place in the United States on Friday, according to the National Weather Service.

This time last year, the high was 91 degrees. The highest temperature ever recorded in the United States was 134 degrees registered at, where else, Death Valley in 1913.

— *National Weather Service*

Stay healthy

- If you're doing yardwork or other activities outside, do it in the morning or evening when it's cooler. Rest often while doing something strenuous outside.
- Monitor those at most the most risk during a heat wave: infants and children up to four, those older than 65, overweight people and those who are ill.
- And of course, drink lots and lots of water.

— *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

Air quality

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reports air quality has been "moderate" in recent days and should be the same today.

— *San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District*

Relief

One suggestion: Find some air conditioning and watch college football, or maybe a movie.

If you want to go swimming, Lodi Lake has been closed (thanks geese) but there are some public options for swimming. Blakely Park pool is located at 1050 S. Stockton St., and open from noon to 5 p.m. The fee

there is \$1 for people 3 years and older. Stillman MaGee Park and the day use area at the fish hatchery are spots for swimming on the Mokelumne River.

Conservation helps thwart energy crisis

By Christian Burkin, Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Friday, Aug. 31, 2007

Strained by days of sweltering heat, the state's electrical power grid narrowly missed reaching an emergency state that would have triggered voluntary shut-offs, but triple digits will linger through Saturday in the Stockton area.

Californians heeded the call to conserve, said Stephanie McCorkle, a spokeswoman for the California Independent System Operator Corp., a nonprofit corporation charged with operating most of California's high-voltage wholesale power grid. By Thursday afternoon, power consumption was lower than expected, staving off a power crisis, McCorkle said.

"The longer we can wait, the better off we are, because it gives us more wiggle room," she said.

A regional heat wave and low hydroelectricity levels throughout the state - about 1,000 megawatts below normal - resulting from this year's dry winter were factors in calling for energy conservation, ISO officials said.

When electrical reserves fall below 5 percent, a Stage 2 emergency is declared. During a Stage 2 emergency, large commercial customers who have volunteered in advance to do so would have their power shut off. The state had expected to declare a Stage 2 electrical emergency by 4 p.m., but usage peaked just under 48,000 megawatts, well below the Stage 2 threshold.

In a service area that stretches from Madera in the south to Galt in the north, Pacific Gas and Electric Co. has 145 commercial customers who have signed up for "demand-response" programs that include voluntary shutoffs, said Nicole Tam, a spokeswoman for PG&E in Stockton.

Locally, the power picture looks good, Tam said.

"PG&E anticipates having adequate supplies to meet customer demand, and reserves, but we are still asking customers to conserve, because the last two days have been incredibly hot," she said.

And it's still hot. Stockton reached 105 degrees on Thursday, a day after hitting a staggering high of 108 degrees. The story was much the same all over San Joaquin County, with Lodi reaching a daily high of 102 degrees, Manteca 102 degrees and Tracy 100 degrees.

County residents sought shelter indoors - or in some cases could not.

There was no air conditioning for postal worker Ken Meadows, who spends his workday outside doing his part to get the mail delivered.

"They said 'rain, sleet and snow,' " he said, referring to the old slogan about what adversity mail workers overcome to do their jobs. "The didn't say nothing about 105 degrees."

Others were more taciturn.

"It's hot," said independent contractor Paul Schaffner, 51, of Lodi. "I do a lot of roofing, but not today. It's too hot. I have to work inside today."

But not everyone can count on air conditioning.

PG&E's Tam said 53 of its customers in the service area that includes San Joaquin County were experiencing outages as of 3 p.m. Thursday - 15 of them in Manteca. The outages were due to equipment failures and were not heat-related, she said.

While state officials opened cooling centers in the southern San Joaquin Valley and Los Angeles areas, none were deemed necessary in San Joaquin County by late afternoon Thursday.

Cooling centers are opened when temperatures top 110 degrees for two consecutive days and when low nighttime temperatures remain above 75 degrees in at least part of the area, a county spokeswoman said.

City spokeswoman Connie Cochran said fire officials were watching for any heat-related problems.

"Right now, we're geared up (to open a cooling center) if we need to," she said.

While searing heat typically contributes to the Valley's ozone air quality problems, strong winds kept the air relatively clean on Thursday, a spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said.

The forecast calls for slighter cooler - but still triple-digit - temperatures with a forecast of 103 today and 100 on Saturday in Stockton, according to KCRA 3 Weather Plus.

Conservation tips

For the home

- Set thermostats at 78 to 80 degrees when home (health permitting) and off when away.
- Avoid using unnecessary lighting and appliances during the peak usage period, from 4 to 6 p.m.
- Turn off your pool pump and avoid outdoor watering during peak hours.

For the office

- Turn off the computer monitor when you're away from your desk.
- Turn off lights and computers in empty offices.
- Switch off the coffee maker at 10 a.m., leave a full pot and reheat individual mugs in the microwave.
- Leave half of the room's overhead lighting off. This means there is less heat from the lights, so the air conditioner gets a break, too.
- Check with the facilities manager that thermostats are set at 78 to 80 degrees during the day, 85 degrees or off evenings and weekends.

More energy conservation tips are available at the Flex Your Power Web site at www.flexyourpower.org. The California ISO Web site www.caiso.com features Today's Outlook, which allows the media and the public to follow electricity grid conditions in real time.

A will to ride

Neighbor's complaints about dust put Galt family through 'bloody hell'

By Matt Brown, News-Sentinel Staff Writer
Lodi News-Sentinel, Friday, August 31, 2007

All Ariel Sarey wanted to do was ride her horses.

When the 15-year-old moved to the San Joaquin County countryside just south of Galt with her family this year, she started riding Raja and her three other horses on the 1.7-acre Liberty Road property.

And then her neighbors complained.

Jeff and Nancy Chapman, who live next door, said that the horses kicked up too much dust, causing a nuisance, according to a complaint filed in San Joaquin County Superior Court.

"We're being targeted and I don't understand why," said Hope DelHierro, Sarey's mother. "We've had this horrific ordeal. It's gone to extremes."

The Chapmans first went to San Joaquin County code enforcement officials, who noted that the horses on their neighbors' property were in a small pen with no shade. Otherwise, it is not against the code to ride horses on an agricultural parcel, county code enforcement chief Mike Ehret said.

"Horses will kick up dust," he said. "I can't envision how one or two horses could kick up too much dust."

Sarey's family rents the 1.7-acre piece of land on a 40-acre parcel that is designated for general agriculture, which allows everything from crop spraying to raising animals.

Animal Control was called in next to investigate the horses' living conditions following the report of the code enforcement officer. An Animal Control report said: "Horses have lots of room. No bad smells. All horses healthy."

Next came the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The air regulators declined to touch the case because the parcel is not big enough and because they only regulate vehicles, not horses, according to an e-mail from the district to DelHiero.

Finally, the Chapmans filed a civil harassment lawsuit seeking a restraining order to stop the dusty horse riding. The suit was thrown out by a Superior Court judge last week.

Nancy Chapman referred comment to her lawyer, Michael Fluetsch, who could not be reached Thursday afternoon.

Sarey's step-father, Glenn DelHiero, said Nancy Chapman had videotaped and photographed Sarey riding her horses and used the photos in court.

"This is beyond insane," said Glenn DelHiero, a security guard in Lodi. "It's been bloody hell."

Glenn DelHiero, who used to work as a bodyguard for "The Bold and the Beautiful" star Michael Tulo, had his firearms confiscated as a result of the civil suit. They still haven't been returned, he said.

Sarey, who has been riding horses since she was nine, has won ribbons for winning 50-mile endurance races. She wants to become a professional horse trainer and said she hasn't let the dispute with her neighbors discourage her.

"At first it was very upsetting," she said. "One person is not going to stop me from six years of passion."

Valley reps face uphill battles

GOP's biggest ag guest-worker advocate resigns at crucial point.

By Michael Doyle / Bee Washington Bureau
Fresno Bee, Sunday, Sept. 2, 2007

WASHINGTON -- San Joaquin Valley lawmakers return to a crowded post-Labor Day agenda having lost one of their top congressional allies to a sex scandal.

The resignation of Sen. Larry Craig of Idaho deprives an agricultural guest-worker bill of its most vehement Republican supporter. Already hanging by a thread, the bill long sought by Valley farmers and farmworkers needs new Capitol Hill patrons.

"It's a devastating blow," Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, said Friday of the imminent likelihood that Craig would resign. "He's been the lead guy in the Senate, and I don't know who's going to pick this up for him."

Chief Republican author of the agricultural guest-worker bill, Craig came under intense GOP pressure to depart following his arrest in a Minneapolis airport men's room. Craig pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct but denies trying to engage in gay sex with an undercover police officer.

The guest-worker bill's drastically diminished prospects are a sobering reminder of the uncertainties facing other Valley congressional priorities.

Congress must finish a dozen big spending bills potentially packed with local projects, like protecting the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

It must confront an ambitious San Joaquin River restoration plan. It must re-debate the Iraq war, and it must do it all amid growing partisan rancor.

"I think Democrats have not fulfilled any of their campaign promises," said Rep. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa. "They promised reform, and they are back to their same old business."

Democrats retort that Republicans are being obstructionist, and lawmakers like Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, can point to progress on a multibillion-dollar farm bill loaded with new money for the Valley's fruit and vegetable growers.

Lawmakers from both parties agree that it's already been a tough year, filled with long hours but hit-or-miss legislating.

The House was in session for 107 days through July 31, compared to 77 days for a comparable period last year. The House took 425 recorded votes through July 31, compared to 230 last year.

Nonetheless, out of 3,269 House bills introduced so far, only 35 bills have been enacted into law. Significantly, Congress has yet to finish any of the must-pass appropriations bills needed to keep the government running in the new fiscal year that starts Oct. 1.

Lawmakers use these bills to promote local projects.

House versions of the spending bills, for instance, include provisions to strengthen delta levees, reinforce California's anti-methamphetamine campaigns and encourage the state's efforts to [cut vehicle emissions](#).

Senate versions add [a San Joaquin Valley ozone study](#) and a new Food and Drug Administration research center in Davis. Starting off with \$2 million in federal funding, the proposed FDA center focusing on fruit-and-vegetable safety would be the first of its kind on the West Coast.

The House has passed its appropriations bills but the Senate has not. In theory, the bills must be passed, negotiated and passed again before October. In practice, Congress has two likelier possibilities.

One possibility is that a stymied Congress -- unable to complete separate bills -- would lump most of the money into one giant omnibus appropriations bill in December.

"Yes, I think we will likely see an omnibus bill, and more opportunity for Democrats to hide wasteful spending," Radanovich said. "Hopefully the Valley's priorities will stay intact."

A sprawling appropriations omnibus, for instance, could become a vehicle for Radanovich's San Joaquin River restoration bill. The bill would authorize work to restore the San Joaquin River below Friant Dam, depleted by decades of irrigation diversions.

Supporters still are struggling to offset the federal costs, pegged at \$500 million. Still, Radanovich said he expects the House Resources Committee to mark up the legislation this month.

Democratic Rep. Jim Costa of Fresno added that "there is still a lot of time" to get the San Joaquin River bill through the committee.

A second possibility is that President Bush would repeatedly veto an omnibus bill after attacking it as bloated. This could force Congress to simply keep spending at current levels. Nunes predicted this would happen, effectively killing local priorities -- including the San Joaquin River package.

Apart from the appropriations bills, the Senate still must write its farm bill, which already has passed the House. Earlier this year, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid promised Craig he would bring up the agricultural guest-worker plan for potential inclusion in the farm bill.

The so-called AgJOBS bill would grant legal U.S. residency to 1.5 million illegal immigrant farmworkers. It also would streamline an existing guest-worker program.

Craig introduced the legislation in 2003, long before Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein started supporting it, and he intensely lobbied his fellow Republican senators last year. But even when he was at his most powerful, as a member of Senate leadership, Craig had a hard time swaying fellow conservatives.

State's bid to set fuel-economy rules endorsed

Nonpartisan report backs California's attempt to get EPA waiver on greenhouse-gas controls

By Frank Davies, Medianews Washington Bureau
Contra Costa Times, Saturday, Sept. 1, 2007

WASHINGTON -- California "appears to have a strong case" in its campaign to secure federal approval to set its own greenhouse-gas controls on vehicles, according to an unreleased report from the Congressional Research Service, a nonpartisan body.

California made its request to the Environmental Protection Agency in December 2005, arguing that in the absence of federal controls, the state had to act on its own to protect its natural resources and the health

of its residents. State officials have accused the Bush administration of dragging its heels on the issue for nearly two years and of bowing to pressure from the auto industry.

EPA chief Stephen Johnson has said he will decide by the end of the year, but Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said the state will sue in federal court by mid-October if no decision is made.

Meanwhile, 14 other states have pledged to adopt standards identical to California's as soon as the EPA gives its approval.

The 20-page research service report, made at the request of an unknown member of Congress, was completed in July and updated Aug. 20, but it has not been made public. MediaNews obtained a copy Friday.

The report found that the state met all tests in getting a waiver from the EPA to enforce its own standards, including "substantial flexibility" for the auto industry and the use of current technologies to meet the new rules, starting with 2009 models.

California also made a "persuasive case" that it has already been granted 53 waivers under the Clean Air Act, with no rejections, and demonstrated the adverse impact of climate change on the state's water supply, air quality and overall health, which merit stringent state regulations.

The Congressional Research Service is used by all members of Congress, and its reports are widely cited on Capitol Hill as factual, unbiased and reliable. State officials said the report's positive assessment of the state's legal and policy arguments could bolster its case with the EPA.

"This report confirms why we're convinced that we have every authority to set tougher standards for our cars, and trust that the federal government will do the right thing," said BreAnda Northcutt, spokeswoman for the state EPA.

Tony Kreindler, a spokesman for Environmental Defense, which has supported California in litigation, said, "This independent analysis seems to leave the EPA little room to deny the waiver. As CRS confirms, California's case is strong, and the agency should stop dragging its feet."

The state case has become politically charged, with high national stakes, because 14 other states -- including New York, Florida and Pennsylvania -- are waiting to adopt California's stringent standards, designed to reduce vehicle greenhouse-gas emissions 30 percent by 2016. The 15 states represent about 44 percent of the nation's population.

"The stakes involved -- both the environmental consequences and the potential impact on the auto industry -- go well beyond California," the report found.

Auto manufacturers have fought the California standards, saying they are an illegal way for states to enforce their own fuel- economy rules. Transportation officials in the Bush administration lobbied against the waiver. Johnson has promised an unbiased decision on the waiver.

Sen. Barbara Boxer of California, who is chairwoman of the Environment Committee, backed a bill requiring the EPA to make a decision by the end of September. The full Senate may take up the bill after it returns next week.

The EPA had resisted regulating greenhouse gases as air pollutants but lost a Supreme Court case in April brought by states, including California, seeking that authority. That decision "does make it harder for the agency to reject the waiver request," the report concluded.

The report also responded to criticism that even if California and the 14 other states enforced the tougher restrictions, that would only cut the nation's total carbon emissions by about 3 percent -- not enough to change the impact of global warming on California.

The state has a history of using the Clean Air Act to implement "incremental steps that reduce emissions" that were later used by other states and Congress, the report found.

"California has served as a laboratory for the demonstration of cutting-edge emission-control technologies which, after being successfully demonstrated there, were adopted in similar form at the national level," the report concluded.

The existence of the report came to light because several groups are pushing to make all such reports public. Under current rules in Congress, it's up to members to make reports public. In some cases, analyses of potential regulations are used by lobbyists long before they receive wide public circulation.

The Center for Democracy and Technology, a nonpartisan advocacy group, has collected and posted Congressional Research Service reports on a Web site, <http://www.opencrs.com>. With the help of an anonymous member of Congress, who supplied the titles of reports not yet made public, the Web site lists those reports by name in a link called "Fugitive CRS Reports."

The California waiver study was one of the 20 such reports since July 3 that the center has listed.

Power companies may offer incentives for plants Hayward residents would be compensated for not burning wood

By Matt O'Brien, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, September 3, 2007

HAYWARD - In exchange for hosting two new gas-burning power plants, Hayward residents could be treated to a gift certificate.

Want to replace your old fireplace or wood stove? The power plant companies will do it for you, or at least pay a portion of what can be an expensive upgrade.

But what if nobody wants a fireplace retrofit? Susie Khaleeli doesn't want two big power plants near her residence, and she doesn't want to sacrifice her fireplace, either.

"What they're saying to us is these plants are going to be polluting - they're going to be polluting over the standards," Khaleeli said. "That's a given. So to counteract their pollution, we are asked to not use our fireplace. That's what it boils down to. And it just doesn't seem right."

No one is mandated to give up a cozy fireplace so that the 600-megawatt Russell City Energy Center and the 115-megawatt Eastshore Energy Center can be built in west Hayward, supplying Pacific Gas & Electric Co. with power to feed the Bay Area's electricity demand.

But the idea that hundreds of area households would be willing to stop burning wood at home, then take advantage of a discount program to switch to cleaner heating systems, is assumed as part of the pollution mitigation plans that could allow one or both Hayward plants to go forward.

"The objective is to offset particulate matter emissions," said Mike Argentine, who is managing the Russell City project for San Jose-based Calpine Corp.

"The idea is we are going to mitigate up to 43 tons with the fireplace retrofit program."

Calpine's plan is to offer Hayward residents a \$400 discount for a fireplace retrofit or a \$700 discount for a wood stove replacement. If not enough Haywardites raise their hands within a year's time, the company will expand the offer to any Alameda County household west of the East Bay hills.

And if that doesn't work, Calpine will move on to a more traditional form of pollution trading, or buying already banked emission credits to reduce pollution elsewhere.

"If the program's not effective, obviously we have to supply emission-reduction credits," Argentine said. "There's no other choice. If we want to build this project, we have to do it."

The California Energy Commission is in the final stages of reviewing Calpine's project. It is also reviewing a similar fireplace retrofit program proposed by Colorado-based Tierra Energy, which wants to build the smaller Eastshore plant about a half-mile from the Russell City plant.

But energy commission staff and two of the commission's five board members already have expressed tacit support for the fireplace retrofit program as an important condition of the projects' approval.

The commission has scheduled a Sept. 12 hearing to vote on whether it will certify the Russell City plant, while a final decision on the Eastshore plant is also expected this year.

"It's fairly nebulous at this point in terms of how the (retrofit) program would be administered," said commission spokesman Bob Aldridge.

Even if the plants are approved by the commission, he said, it would most likely be the responsibility of another agency, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, to oversee how the fireplace program works.

Air district officials point out that nearly 2 million fireplaces and wood stoves throughout the nine-county Bay Area release a significant amount of fine particulate matter and other pollutants into the region's wintertime air, contributing to health problems.

The two gas-fired Hayward power plants would also be releasing a heavy dose of particulate matter - dozens of pounds per hour of the airborne pollutant, amounting to up to 150 tons per year if both plants are operating at maximum capacities, according to information culled from energy commission reports.

In comparison, the worst residential fireplaces can emit up to 60 grams per hour of fine particulates, and old wood stoves can emit up to 18 grams per hour, according to data from the Environmental Protection Agency.

When many homeowners use them, those grams can quickly add up, said air district spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick.

"It's significant how much an older, dirtier fireplace will put out," she said.

In the Santa Clara Valley, where the air district implemented a fireplace retrofit program several years ago to mitigate a new power plant, wood smoke was contributing to an estimated 44 percent of the total amount of air pollution coming from fine particles of less than 2.5 microns in diameter, Schkolnick said.

Those tiny particulates are particularly dangerous pollutants because the human body can't just cough or blow them out of the nose.

"Because of its size, it's able to travel deeply in the lungs and cross into the blood vessels," she said.

Khaleeli, who lives near Chabot College, said she recognizes the environmental impact of her fireplace. But she uses it less than a dozen times a year and wants to keep doing so.

"And I use my heater and my furnace less days than that," she said.

Another local resident and power plant opponent, Joanne Gardiner, said few are going to want to give up on fireplaces because it devalues their home and takes away "that real rootsy, homey feeling that all of us crave for at one time or another."

According to energy commission documents, each resident participating in the rebate would have to prove that they have replaced their wood stove or fireplace with a natural gas-fired unit. Or, they could permanently plug up and shut down the home's fireplace or chimney and use the money toward improving central heating or air conditioning.

"I don't believe there are homeowners in Hayward or any other community that would be willing to spend \$3,000 out of their pocket to do this," said Gardiner, a local Realtor who suspects replacements will cost far more than the value of the discount. "That's like chopping off a significant attraction to a home. It's like the difference between a house with one bathroom and two."

Gardiner said she believes the power plant companies should be finding other methods to lessen their environmental impact, or not build them in Hayward at all.

She points out that energy commission staff scientists, without making any requirements, recommended that Calpine could reduce Russell City's particulate emissions if it redesigned the power plant to incorporate a cleaner cool-start mechanism.

Asked about the technology mentioned in the commission report, Argentine said it "would require a major, major redesign" and is also not a proven technology. In contrast, replacing fireplaces has a demonstrable result in reducing pollution, he argued.

Riders flock to transit on year's second Spare the Air day

Rachel Gordon, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, Sept. 1, 2007

Oakland -- The allure of free rides once again boosted ridership on Bay Area public transit systems Thursday.

Among all the agencies, the Marin ferries picked up the greatest percentage gain in passengers during the season's second Spare the Air day -- a program in which public transit riders in the region get to board for free. The goal is twofold: to lure people out of their pollution-causing automobiles and to promote the Bay Area's bus, train and ferry operations.

The first Spare the Air Day of 2007 was called for Wednesday by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. On both Wednesday and Thursday, when temperatures were high and winds were mild, the air quality in the Bay Area did not exceed federal smog limits.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission released numbers Friday detailing Thursday's success in getting people on transit.

The commission compared Thursday's ridership with the boardings from a week earlier on Aug. 23. Among the examples of increased ridership: San Francisco's Muni, 41 percent; AC Transit, 27 percent; Tri Delta Transit, 41 percent; BART, 1 percent; Vallejo Ferry, 27 percent; and the Golden Gate Ferry's Sausalito-to-San Francisco runs, 289 percent.

The free rides ended at 1 p.m. on the ferries and on BART, Caltrain and Altamont Commuter Express trains. The budget for this year's fare-free Spare the Air program is \$7.5 million, enough to fund four days. The money is used to reimburse operators for missed fare-box revenue.

Can you buy a greener conscience?

A budding industry sells 'offsets' of carbon emissions, investing in environmental projects. But there are doubts about whether it works.

By Alan Zarembo, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Sunday, Sept. 2, 2007

The Oscar-winning film "An Inconvenient Truth" touted itself as the world's first carbon-neutral documentary.

The producers said that every ounce of carbon emitted during production -- from jet travel, electricity for filming and gasoline for cars and trucks -- was counterbalanced by reducing emissions somewhere else in the world. It only made sense that a film about the perils of global warming wouldn't contribute to the problem.

Co-producer Lesley Chilcott used an online calculator to estimate that shooting the film used 41.4 tons of carbon dioxide and paid a middleman, a company called Native Energy, \$12 a ton, or \$496.80, to broker a deal to cut greenhouse gases elsewhere. The film's distributors later made a similar payment to neutralize carbon dioxide from the marketing of the movie.

It was a ridiculously good deal with one problem: So far, it has not led to any additional emissions reductions.

Beneath the feel-good simplicity of buying your way to carbon neutrality is a growing concern that the idea is more hype than solution.

According to Native Energy, money from "An Inconvenient Truth," along with payments from others trying to neutralize their emissions, went to the developers of a methane collector on a Pennsylvanian farm and three wind turbines in an Alaskan village.

As it turned out, both projects had already been designed and financed, and the contributions from Native Energy covered only a minor fraction of their costs. "If you really believe you're carbon neutral, you're kidding yourself," said Gregg Marland, a fossil-fuel pollution expert at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee who has been watching the evolution of the new carbon markets. "You can't get out of it that easily."

The race to save the planet from global warming has spawned a budding industry of middlemen selling environmental salvation at bargain prices.

The companies take millions of dollars collected from their customers and funnel them into carbon-cutting projects, such as tree farms in Ecuador, windmills in Minnesota and no-till fields in Iowa.

In return, customers get to claim the reductions, known as voluntary carbon offsets, as their own. For less than \$100 a year, even a Hummer can be pollution-free -- at least on paper.

Driven by guilt, public relations or genuine concern over global warming, tens of thousands of people have purchased offsets to zero out their carbon impact on the planet.

"It made me feel better about driving my car," said Nicky Tenpas, a 29-year-old occupational therapist from Hermosa Beach, who bought offsets to neutralize emissions from the Jeep she always wanted.

The star of "An Inconvenient Truth," former Vice President Al Gore, says he and his family are carbon neutral, as are Dave Matthews Band concerts and Coldplay albums. The travel websites Expedia and Travelocity now offer passengers the option of counteracting their flights, and Rupert Murdoch promises that his entire News Corp. will be carbon neutral by 2010, largely through the purchase of offsets.

Offset companies stress that they are not a cure-all for the world's greenhouse gas emissions, which are equivalent to 54 billion tons of carbon dioxide each year.

Tom Boucher, chief executive of Native Energy, said people should first reduce their energy consumption and waste, and then buy offsets -- "the only way to really get to zero unless you stop driving, stop traveling."

But the industry is clouded by an approach to carbon accounting that makes it easy to claim reductions that didn't occur. Many projects that have received money from offset companies would have reduced emissions by the same amount anyway.

The growing popularity of offsets has now prompted the Federal Trade Commission to begin looking into the \$55-million-a-year industry.

"Everybody would like to find happy-face, win-win solutions that don't cost anything," said Robert Stavins, an environmental economist at Harvard University. "Unfortunately, they don't exist."

Selling clean air in the rolling hills of southwestern Pennsylvania, outside the town of Berlin, Dave Van Gilder's family has been raising cows for four decades. He and his twin sons, Jason and Justin, tend to their 400 Holsteins while his wife, Connie, keeps the books.

The smell of manure has long been the sweet exhaust of a dairy farm running full tilt.

Millions of pounds of cow excrement over the decades were funneled from the barns to a 3.3-million-gallon lagoon, where it decayed, burping invisible clouds of the potent greenhouse gas methane.

In the days of Van Gilder's father, nobody cared about the greenhouse gases.

But things began to change a few years ago. Van Gilder didn't know it, but his lagoon had become an economic opportunity.

A local congressman urged him to apply for a state alternative energy grant to build a system that would capture methane from cow manure and burn it to generate electricity.

The whole project, known as a methane digester, would cost about \$750,000 -- \$631,000 of it coming from the state and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Van Gilder had to make up the difference, but he figured he could earn that back -- and in several years start making money -- by supplying electricity for the farm and selling the excess to the local utility.

A year before construction began, Van Gilder was contacted by Native Energy, which wanted to buy his emissions reduction, along with the reductions of others who had won state energy grants.

Van Gilder had never heard of the company or the idea of selling clean air.

Nothing came of his discussions with the company until construction started on the massive tank for heating manure. He gladly signed a contract to sell Native Energy 29,000 tons in carbon dioxide

reductions -- the company's estimate of how much greenhouse gas the digester will keep out of the atmosphere over the next 20 years.

"There wasn't a lot of negotiation," said Van Gilder, who was happy to accept whatever the company was offering.

Family members said the contract prohibited them from disclosing the payment, but based on a contract with another dairy farmer, signed with Native Energy, it was about \$70,000, or \$2.40 a ton.

Justin Van Gilder said the money had nothing to do with the family's decision to build its methane plant. "It was a free bonus," he said.

"We still don't understand it all," Connie Van Gilder said. "It's hard for us to fathom, to see what it is doing."

The situation was similar for the Alaska Village Electric Cooperative, a power utility for dozens of remote communities.

In early 2006, account manager Brent Petrie was at an Anchorage environmental conference talking about a windmill project that the cooperative was building in the Yup'ik Eskimo village of Kasigluk, a soggy patch of tundra on the remote Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in western Alaska.

Rising 100 feet over the landscape, the three 100-kilowatt turbines were intended to reduce the area's dependence on diesel generators, whose fuel must be shipped in on barges. Federal grants were covering \$2.8 million of the project's \$3.1-million cost.

Petrie had barely finished his presentation when he was cornered by representatives from two brokers -- Native Energy and the Bonneville Environmental Foundation -- eager to buy the project's offsets.

The cooperative sold 25 years of carbon dioxide reductions to Native Energy for \$36,000 -- roughly \$4 a ton.

Native Energy had contributed just over 1% of the total cost of the project yet claimed 100% of its carbon reductions.

"If you look at the costs of these projects, it's a tiny, tiny fraction," said cooperative president Meera Kohler. The payment did "not determine whether those blades turn or not."

At best, Kohler said, the money could cover some maintenance costs.

An untapped market

Despite its relatively small role in the project, Native Energy counts the windmills as a success, demonstrating the power of carbon offsets to encourage clean energy.

"Every kilowatt-hour they produce means one fewer kilowatt-hour is generated by the diesel generators that otherwise provide power for this village," the company's website says.

Wind power has long been a fascination for Boucher, Native Energy's co-founder. As an electrical engineering major in the 1970s at the University of Vermont, he built a 25-foot-high wind turbine in his parents' backyard, carving the blades from a piece of redwood.

He later worked at a Vermont utility and helped develop one of the first wind farms in the northeast. Boucher started his own company in the 1990s to sell alternative energy but soon came upon a simpler and possibly more lucrative product: voluntary carbon offsets.

It was a new twist on an old idea.

About 30 years ago, the U.S. government began fostering emissions markets that allowed industrial polluters to buy offsets for such gases as nitrogen oxides and sulfur oxides. One of their successes has been in reducing acid rain in the Northeast.

The Europeans have recently adopted a similar model to regulate carbon dioxide emissions, allowing the continent's dirtiest industries to buy and sell rights to spew greenhouse gases.

The key to these regulated markets is a gradually falling cap on total emissions, forcing factories to either reduce their own emissions or buy someone else's reductions at increasing prices.

Boucher and other environmental entrepreneurs, however, believed there was an untapped market for carbon reductions: people and companies who would buy them voluntarily.

"What was coming was a way for folks to take actions against global warming," said Boucher, a bearded 52-year-old, who has long believed that alternative energy can be competitive with cheaper power from fossil fuels.

Native Energy, based in Charlotte, Vt., was one of the first offset companies in the United States and has become one of the most respected in environmental circles.

It has sold offsets to thousands of individuals and companies, including Levi Strauss & Co. and Ben & Jerry's. It has been big with political campaigns, providing offsets to Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Rodham Clinton and John Edwards. The producers of the 2005 film "Syriana," which claims to be the first carbon-neutral major motion picture, bought 2,040 tons of carbon dioxide reductions from the company.

After Native Energy's name was mentioned in the final credits for "An Inconvenient Truth," visits to the company's website jumped 1,100%, marketing director Billy Connelly said.

As a private company, it doesn't report its revenue, but Connelly said he expects it will double its sales this year, reaching a total of about 1 million tons of carbon dioxide neutralized since its founding.

"Things have really taken off in the last year or two," said Boucher. The company has about 20 employees.

Native Energy now finds itself facing competition from nearly three dozen other offset firms worldwide. Some are nonprofit, but most of the biggest are in business to make money.

In 2006, offset companies sold greenhouse gas reductions equivalent to at least 14.8 million tons of carbon dioxide, more than double the previous year, said Katherine Hamilton, carbon project manager for Ecosystem Marketplace, which tracks the industry.

Sales are expected to double again this year.

Requirements are vague

For all the money spent, nobody can say if the offsets have done much to alleviate global warming.

The problem is whether the voluntary reductions really exist. The buzzword in the industry is "additionality" -- the idea that offset purchases actually lead to additional greenhouse gas reductions.

The concept should be simple: Pay for a project, monitor its actual reductions, then claim your share.

Instead, offset companies often have vague requirements to determine if their potential investments would actually lead to additional reductions.

Native Energy says it looks for projects that need offset revenue to survive -- a difficult standard, since the projects are expensive and the offset payments are relatively small. But even if a project can stand on its own, it can still qualify for the money if it is novel or simply "not business as usual," according to the company's website.

That definition has allowed Native Energy and other offset companies to claim the carbon reductions from projects in which they have played minor roles. Still, Native Energy's contract requires projects to certify that whatever offset money they receive "is a necessary component of the project's economic viability."

The company has struggled with whether its funding matters. Boucher said the windmills in Alaska were debated for weeks inside Native Energy since the project already had been funded by the government. "This is a case of one of the more difficult determinations," he said.

Native Energy, he said, eventually concluded that its contribution, if used as a reserve fund for emergency repairs, was meaningful. It helps "to make sure these turbines will run as well as they can, and to further the chances that other wind farms will be built," he said.

In the case of the methane digester, Boucher said the reductions were additional since the offset payments helped cover a significant portion of Van Gilder's out-of-pocket expenses.

The best way to ensure additionality, according to Native Energy, is to pay a project for a decade or more of offsets while the developers are still arranging the financing.

The downside is that the carbon reductions might not occur for a decade or more.

One of Native Energy's expected future projects is a windmill development being planned for a South Dakota Sioux reservation. Part of the offset money from "An Inconvenient Truth" has been earmarked for the \$45-million project, known as the Owl Feather War Bonnet Wind Farm.

Native Energy and the developers are still negotiating, but the payment for the next 25 years of carbon reductions could be a few million dollars.

Even in this ideal case, the developer is hesitant to say that the money he will get from Native Energy is essential.

"Could we do it without it?" said Dale Osborn, head of Distributed Generation Systems Inc. in Lakewood, Colo. "Maybe. But that would require charging more for the energy or the investors accepting a lower rate of return."

Several environmental and clean energy groups have also raised concerns about verifying projects, monitoring their actual carbon reductions and ensuring that each carbon offset is not sold more than once.

"People are trying to do the right thing," said Peter Knight, a partner with AI Gore in Generation Investment Management, which invests in environmentally responsible companies. "It's a new field . . . and it's going through some growing pains."

Price of feeling good

Without government regulation and mandatory caps on emissions, all that is left to drive offset sales is guilt and marketing. Offset companies charge what the market will bear.

"How much are you willing to spend to feel good or to impress your neighbors?" asked Marland, of Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

For Katy Hansen, a 29-year-old law school student, the answer was \$429.99.

She wanted to offset the travel of the guests to her May wedding in Madison, Wis., and paid San Francisco-based offset company TerraPass Inc. to neutralize 40 tons of carbon dioxide.

"The wedding felt out of character in a way," she said. "It was more overdone than anything in our lives."

It was a well-intended gesture, but one that some scientists say does carry a price. Offsets are so convenient that they may foster a false sense that global warming can be easily solved when the hard and expensive work remains undone.

A United Nations panel recently concluded that actually reducing emissions to avoid the worst perils of global warming would cost trillions of dollars a year over the next several decades.

"These offsets are not addressing the problem that must be addressed now," said James Hansen, NASA's top climate researcher. "If we just fool around with marginal things, we will be up a creek without a paddle in the rather near future."

Despite the imperfections of the offset market, some customers say, it still helps people think about their own responsibility for global warming.

"It's a powerful first step," said Davis Guggenheim, director of "An Inconvenient Truth." "The choice of doing this rather than nothing is not a choice."

He acknowledged the skepticism about voluntary offsets, but he added, "All of us knew when you're doing offsets that the theoretical and symbolic quality to doing this is as important as the practical quality."

Ethan Prochnik, a 43-year-old freelance television producer in Los Angeles, said the enormous threat of global warming means that everyone has to help in reducing emissions.

He foresees a time when a carbon tax will be factored into the price of every tomato, every pair of jeans, every computer.

Until then, offset payments are a sort of self-imposed pollution tax.

For months, Prochnik and his fiancée saved to offset a year of their lives. He finally went to the website for an Oregon company called the Climate Trust. He entered their state of residence, the size of their Montecito Heights house, their cars, their annual mileage and the number of flights they took in a year.

"It's like a poor man's Prius," he said, explaining that he couldn't afford to trade his Isuzu Rodeo SUV for a hybrid.

"It does make you feel a little better," said his fiancée, Amber Vovola, 29.

Prochnik entered his credit card number and pressed the "enter" key. The total came to 21.22 metric tons of carbon dioxide, or \$200.28.

Figuring that the website calculator didn't cover all their pollution, he decided to buy an additional \$300 in offsets, just to be safe.

Not in Whose Backyard?

By AMANDA GRISCOM LITTLE

N.Y. Times, Sunday, Sept. 2, 2007

Consider this curiosity of United States environmental policy: Countless federal laws have been written to preserve far-flung wilderness that Americans rarely visit (the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, for instance) and endangered species that we scarcely see (from longhorn fairy shrimp to piping plovers). Yet no legislation has been tailored to protect a landscape that is perhaps the most vulnerable: the low-income communities that shelter most of America's polluting facilities.

Later this month, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton will introduce the Environmental Justice Renewal Act, which would direct additional federal funds to assisting environmentally beleaguered communities. The bill complements another proposal Clinton helped sponsor, which would require the Environmental Protection Agency to monitor and mitigate the health impacts of power plants, waste-transfer stations, truck fleets, refineries and other industrial infrastructure, which tend to be overwhelmingly concentrated in America's poorest neighborhoods.

Both bills are expected to meet opposition in Congress. Nevertheless, their introduction suggests a coming of age for the environmental-justice movement. The movement - whose proponents hold that minority and low-income populations should not be subjected to more environmental burdens than others - has been growing at the grass-roots level for decades. Yet disproportionately high pollution levels continue to plague poor communities, and race often correlates with which populations are hit the hardest: African-Americans, for instance, are 79 percent more likely than whites to live in areas where air-pollution levels pose health risks, according to a 2005 Associated Press analysis of E.P.A. data. Lead-poisoning rates among Hispanic and black children are roughly double those among white children.

Environmental-justice advocates take pains to assert that they are neither antidevelopment nor anti-industry. "We can't fight this battle at the expense of jobs," says Majora Carter, a MacArthur fellow from the South Bronx, where children's asthma rates are several times the national average. "We need to work; we also need to breathe - our goal is to find a way of doing both." Carter and the organization she founded, Sustainable South Bronx, have fought dozens of proposals for new or expanded industrial sites, while simultaneously exhorting green businesses - like a high-tech recycling plant - to bring skilled jobs to the community. (The latter goal got a boost this summer when the House and Senate passed bills to put about \$100 million toward training workers for jobs in green energy.)

But are environmental-justice goals always compatible with economic growth? There is a debate, says Daniel Doctoroff, New York City's deputy mayor for economic development and rebuilding: "On the one hand, environmental issues, versus having more jobs." Real estate is scarce. No matter how clean and

efficient industrial sites are, he says, "there will always be things that nobody wants, and we have to find places to put them." And taxpayers will inevitably question why they should foot the bill for a sewage-treatment plant on the Upper East Side when it could be placed in a far less expensive neighborhood.

Some critics of the environmental-justice movement go further. It is not surprising, they say, that land near toxic sites is inexpensive and that the people who live there are poor. "It's neither possible nor desirable in a free society to have all groups living equally close to everything - be it libraries or landfills," argues Michael Steinberg, a Washington lawyer with clients in the chemical industry. "Even the old Soviet Politburo would have a hard time pulling that one off." The mere fact of disparate impact, he says, is not evidence of intentional discrimination in the placement of polluting facilities - it's just economics.

On the other side of the spectrum, some environmental-justice advocates say Clinton's proposals don't go far enough. Norris McDonald, president of the African American Environmentalist Association, calls the bills "a Band-Aid, nothing more." He points out that they don't give citizens the legal power to sue the industries polluting their backyards. McDonald sees Clinton's recent efforts as a political move to secure the black vote.

Two years ago, Clinton and Barack Obama collaborated on a community-health bill. Now environmental-justice activists are waiting to see if Obama, who has been cautious on race-related issues, will respond to Clinton's latest proposals with a countermeasure: "Okay, Barack," McDonald taunts, "you gonna dance or let Hillary have the floor?"

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Sunday, Sept. 2, 2007:](#)

Hardisty Column

By Dianne Hardisty

Kern County supervisors are taking to a higher court their fight against Los Angeles dumping millions of gallons of sludge a year onto farmland south of Bakersfield.

Last month, a federal judge in Los Angeles overturned Kern County's voter-imposed ban on smearing human and industrial waste on farmland.

Acknowledging the merit of environmental concerns about sludge, the judge sided with the city of Los Angeles, ruling that Measure E violates commerce protections in the U.S. Constitution. Kern County supervisors are appealing the ruling to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

The appeal is expected to take about two years maybe longer if the battle moves all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, the city of Los Angeles can keep hauling its sludge a goo scraped from the bottom of sewage treatment plants to the property it owns near the intersection of Interstate 5 and Highway 119.

Los Angeles has named its dumping field "Green Acres Farm," which Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa characterizes as a "good neighbor" to Kern County residents.

Legislation designed to protect the ability of urban areas, such as Los Angeles, to dump on their rural neighbors limits local governments from regulating these operations. And "blanket" statewide rules limit the enforcement of odor laws and water pollution controls.

But the federal judge's ruling last month left in place Kern County's earlier sludge oversight ordinance, which calls for inspecting and testing waste, and limits disposal to "exceptional quality."

Likely the greatest safeguard Kern County residents can anticipate barring the Measure E ban is a rule adopted in March by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The rule was part of a larger effort targeting emissions that make the valley one of the most polluted air basins in the nation.

Rule 4565 (which has been posted with this column on the Opinion section's Fired Up! blog at www.bakersfield.com) is designed to reduce the amount of volatile organic compounds (gas-like fumes) released into the air by those who apply sludge to the land, as well as composting facilities. Until this district rule was adopted, these operations generally escaped air pollution control scrutiny.

Sludge and composting operators, such as the one harvesting Los Angeles' "crop" at the Green Acres Farm, have until March 2008 to submit plans to the air district to cut VOC emissions and by extension reduce odors. They have until September 2008 to implement those plans.

Ways to cut obnoxious and polluting gases from simmering off the piles of human and industrial waste at the Green Acres Farm include injecting the waste under a soil cover, mixing it with a material and then working it into the soil, or covering it. The most encouraging aspect of this rule is that it will give the air district enforcement authority.

Controlling air pollution from sludge spreaders and composting operations is "a priority for the district," said Jaime Holt, chief communications officer.

She urged Kern County residents who have complaints about the Green Acres Farm, as well as other sludge disposal and composting facilities in Kern County, to contact the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Dianne Hardisty is The Californian's editorial page editor.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Tuesday, Sept. 4, 2007:](#)

**WAYNE MADSEN: Proposal is a poison pill to block climate action
Should Congress consider Rep. John Dingell's proposal to thwart global warming?**

WASHINGTON -- House Energy and Commerce Committee chairman Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., is so out of touch with the progressive thinking in his party today that he has become a Democrat in name only.

The blustery 81-year-old dean of the House of Representatives has been bullying his way around Capitol Hill since the first term of President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Over the decades, Dingell has become firmly entrenched as the best friend that Big Auto, Big Oil and Big Bullets -- in the form of the National Rifle Association -- have ever had in Congress.

Dingell's recent mock-serious proposal to create a huge new carbon tax on fossil fuels is merely, by his own admission, a ruse to show how unpopular such a tax would be with the American people. Its real aim is to relegate House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. -- a suave and savvy San Franciscan -- back to the political kitchen.

Dingell calculates his call for a 50-cent per gallon federal tax on carbon fuels will scare Americans away from Pelosi's campaign to curb global warming. He also wants to eliminate the mortgage deduction for homes of more than 3,000 square feet -- about 600 more square feet than the average American home.

He believes that Americans hate the idea of any tax increases -- even those aimed at saving our fragile planet from an onrushing apocalypse.

But he is wrong. Most Americans now consider global warming a catastrophic threat to Mother Earth and a growing majority likely would be willing to put some extra money into a fund that helps develop more sustainable and benign energy sources.

His cynicism sells short the can-do spirit of our citizens. In times of peril like World War II, they have always stepped up and embraced personal sacrifice. With the disaster of global warming looming, they are prepared to do that once again.

Dingell, who protects his legislative territory like an aging lion guards his hunting ground, has been plotting revenge on Pelosi since she attempted to end-run his jurisdiction by creating a new House Select Committee on

Climate Change and Global Warming gaveled by Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass.

Both Pelosi and Markey are united in a desire to propose more stringent federal Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards for autos, SUVs and small trucks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions -- the main culprit behind global warming.

Dingell and his car pals in Detroit already have managed to squash a Markey committee proposal -- already passed by the Senate -- to push CAFE mileage requirements to an average of 35 miles per gallon by 2020.

Big Auto suffered huge profit losses by continuing to roll-out gas-guzzling minivans, SUVs and civilianized-military vehicles as events like the Middle East crisis conspired to send prices sky-rocketing well past the \$3 per gallon mark.

Now, as more and more Americans flock to Japanese hybrids and -- where available -- urban mass transit, the Big Three are hoping Dingell can round up some of the Democrats' old bulls for one last stand against the forces of progress.

Fortunately, there are signs that old bulls are beginning to run out of gas. Younger, more visionary Democrats are emerging to join the grand alliance being assembled by Pelosi, Senate Energy Committee chair Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., and senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

What's more, many Republicans also are from the prairie and plains states where farmers are reaping a bonanza as demand rises for ethanol and other bio-fuels distilled from corn and grass.

In his former stint as chairman of Energy and Commerce, Dingell's autocracy led insiders to remark, "If you can see it, taste it, smell it, touch it or hear it, Big Jawn has jurisdiction over it."

Now Chairman Dingell is about to find that his power is greatly diminished; that the gavel he once wielded against his enemies like an Excalibur may splinter upon impact.

Wayne Madsen is a contributing writer for the liberal Online Journal.

[Editorial in the Modesto Bee, Friday, Aug. 31, 2007:](#)

Association shells away reasons to reject plant

In 2003, the Stanislaus County Planning Commission OK'd the Salida Hulling Association's plan to move its almond hulling operation to a more rural location, on agriculturally zoned land along Dakota Avenue at the west edge of Modesto.

Next week, the Planning Commission should approve the project all over again -- and allow it to finally get built.

Because of the threat of a lawsuit by owners of nearby ranchettes, the association paid for an expensive environmental impact report that runs 356 pages and covers everything from traffic and air pollution to the glare caused by lighting.

County planning staff has concluded that the environmental impact report and the proposed mitigations satisfy California Environmental Quality Act requirements. An even more persuasive argument is that the huller will be located in an ag zone, where direct ag-related facilities are permitted.

This is a classic urban-rural conflict. People who wanted country living oppose the disruptions associated with farming. This is why Stanislaus County has a right-to-farm ordinance, to make it clear to all that farmers have a right to practice their trade so long as they abide by existing regulations.

Almonds are an important crop in Stanislaus; No. 2 on the list of the top 10 commodities. Hulling is an essential part of almond processing, and there are small hullers scattered throughout the region.

Salida Hulling faces a long list of regulations in building and operating the facility. It will have to abide by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District rules for dust control. It will monitor noise, and a noise berm is part of the design. The association is paying for a huge water tank for the Woodland Avenue Fire District in case of a fire. And it likely will help pay for a traffic signal at Maze Boulevard and Dakota. Also, the project is set well back onto its property so it should not interfere with the eventual widening of Maze (Highway 132).

In other words, the association is meeting the many obligations placed upon it. Comments submitted by and on behalf of neighbors suggest that mere modifications to the project won't ever satisfy them; they want it go elsewhere.

The Salida Hulling Association started in 1970 in what was then a rural location. Now that location is surrounded by other businesses and there are homes nearby. It has chosen a new location accessible to almond growers but not in the path of Modesto or Salida's growth. Most important, it bought property with the appropriate zoning. This project deserves approval -- again.

The county Planning Commission meets at 6 p.m. Sept. 6 in the basement of Tenth Street Place, 1010 10th St., downtown Modesto. The long EIR (27.44 megabytes) is available online at www.co.stanislaus.ca.us/planning/planhome.htm.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, Sept. 3, 2007:](#)

On Labor Day, look to the future of Valley jobs

Education, training are key to a better economy.

"California is a garden of Eden, a paradise to live in or see;

"But believe it or not, you won't find it so hot

"If you ain't got the do re mi."

-- Woodie Guthrie, "Do Re Mi"

There is a grim irony to the celebration of Labor Day in the Valley. While we eulogize the character and unsurpassed productivity of American workers, far too many Valley residents have no work, or have jobs that don't pay enough to provide a decent level of comfort and security for themselves and their families.

The galling fact is that there are many good jobs going begging -- there just aren't sufficient skilled people to fill them. A recent study by the Fresno County Workforce Investment Board revealed that 27,000 jobs would go unfilled in the next three years because potential employees lack the needed skills.

There are a number of reasons for this shortfall. Too many young people are poorly prepared when they leave high school -- even if they've earned a diploma and passed all the tests. Witness the marked increase in remedial education at America's colleges in recent decades.

Schools have largely abandoned vocational education, a concomitant of the extreme focus on sending kids to college -- even when college may not be the most useful choice for them.

Thankfully, some school districts have begun to turn that around, recognizing that there are many highly skilled jobs that don't require a college degree, but do pay fine wages -- enough to support a family in a middle-class lifestyle.

In the Valley, a large number of potential workers have a poor command of English, or none at all. That usually restricts them to the jobs with the lowest wages.

We spend a lot of time and a lot of money on dozens of different job-training programs, but we rarely return to analyze their success once they're established. A comprehensive survey of these programs might result in a more streamlined approach that's both less costly and more effective.

Far too many bright young people leave the region as soon as they are able. There are a variety of reasons for this: lack of opportunity, the belief that the Valley is a cultural backwater, [poor air quality](#), a perceived lack of amenities and other quality of life issues.

But these are the very people who will be needed to build a better economy in the Valley. Such people create jobs for others, and that creates wealth for the entire community.

In the end, reducing unemployment and poverty and raising wages is a matter of investment. Money spent on better education and more effective training is a short-term expense that will pay handsome dividends. Money spent now to clean up the Valley's air and create a 21st century transportation system will reap rewards in better health and greater opportunities down the road. Money spent now to build libraries, parks and museums will spur creative impulses and drive the creation of new wealth.

And maybe, in the process, we can make Labor Day more than just a milestone to mark the end of summer. Maybe it can once again be a celebration of the character and productivity of all American workers.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Tuesday, Sept. 4, 2007:](#)

California greening

GERMANY BROUGHT its call to action in the fight against global warming to California last week, following similar presentations to the European Union and the G8 conference of industrial leaders.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier made his only U.S. stop in California on a multi-country tour to spread the word about the need for global cooperation on climate change.

The message: California's policies and innovations in cleantech and greentech distinguish us as a global leader on climate change. Germany, also a green innovator, wants the state as a political partner to help shape attitudes toward climate change.

"When it comes to shaping this first global century, we (California and Germany) are kindred spirits. My hope for the future is that we will cooperate not just culturally and economically, but also much more politically," Steinmeier told a packed room Aug. 30 at a joint meeting of the Commonwealth Club of Northern California and the World Affairs Council in San Francisco.

Flattering, perhaps, that the German foreign minister has accorded a state the political recognition typically bestowed upon a nation, especially when he called California "the most important testing laboratory for our global future."

The proposal, however, wasn't purely political, but also practical. Steinmeier met with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger earlier in the day to propose bringing California into the European market to trade pollution credits. Requiring industry to pay to pollute is the linchpin to California's plan to reduce greenhouse gases.

Does it make sense to link pollution-trading markets in different countries, on separate continents, with different rules, regulations and goals? Experts on both sides of the Atlantic say it will be difficult, but it can be done.

European pollution-reduction targets are more aggressive than what has been proposed in the United States, even in California. But global warming is not the only concern.

The recent dash by Russia and other nations to the Arctic, to claim oil and gas reserves newly exposed as the polar ice melts, lays bare the potential for conflict over diminishing energy sources. A shift away from an oil economy to new energy sources is a global security issue. Conversely, global warming and warring are linked.

California and Germany are leaders in green technologies, and share many priorities on addressing climate change and developing sustainable energy sources. A closer working relationship would advance the progress of both.

The fight against global climate change will take global cooperation. If it takes region-to-region collaborations to span the globe, then let it start here.

[L.A Times editorial, Friday, Aug. 31, 2007:](#)

Cheap coal, dirty air

The latest in a series of decisions gutting coal-mining regulations will devastate mountain ecosystems.

Coal is one of the most environmentally destructive substances on Earth. Coal-fired power plants, which produce more than half the nation's electricity, are the biggest source of airborne toxic substances in the U.S. and are responsible for about half the particulate matter polluting our skies. They are also often fingered as the biggest contributors to global warming because of the greenhouse gases they emit. What is less discussed is the horrifying damage wrought by coal even before it makes its way to the power plant -- damage that may soon grow even worse thanks to a disgraceful decision by mining regulators.

The Office of Surface Mining has, under the Bush administration, been chipping away at the landmark regulations established by Congress three decades ago to protect the environment from the most abusive mining practices. Last week, this culminated in a decision that would obliterate the 1983 stream buffer zone rule, which forbids mining activities within 100 feet of a river or stream. This has always been an

unclear law, subject to interpretation, but it at least served as a slight brake on the practice of dumping mine debris in nearby canyons and valleys, burying streams and devastating mountain ecosystems. The mining agency's decision, which will be finalized after a 60-day comment period, "clarifies" the rule by gutting it.

Mining industry officials claim that it would be all but impossible to mine for coal without destroying streams because all mines, and especially the mountaintop strip mines in the Appalachia region, produce dirt and rubble, and the only place to dump it is in canyons. This is patently untrue. Less industry-friendly administrations have required mining companies to construct fill areas away from headwaters and truck the debris there; somehow, the industry managed to survive.

What the rule change is really about is making coal cheaper. It costs more to mine in an environmentally responsible way, and that in turn raises the price of coal. But everyone is burdened by the costs of the industry's bad practices, in such forms as higher healthcare bills, cleanup costs for water polluted by mines and the expense of rebuilding infrastructure destroyed by a changing climate.

Coal should not be cheap. The only way to encourage cleaner alternatives is to make coal producers and the consumers of coal-fired power pay the true cost of their pollution. It's clear that won't happen at the behest of the Bush administration, which is why Congress must exercise much stronger coal industry oversight and strengthen laws that protect the environment from unsupervised miners.

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee, Monday, Sept. 3, 2007:](#)

Freedom displays the air-quality flag

The writer of "Sylvan schools should raise this flag" (Aug. 27, Page B-7), should drive by Freedom Elementary on any given day. Though the air-quality flag is not raised on the flagpole, it is displayed clearly on our school's main entrance gate for all students, parents and teachers to see. This has been done each and every day for more than two years.

In addition, our principal includes the air-quality flag color in her morning message as a reminder to all students and staff. We are proud of our attendance campaign, "Every Day Counts." In fact, Freedom Elementary has the best attendance rate in our district. The Sylvan School District has done an exemplary job in raising awareness on air quality, as well as student attendance.

MICHELE CALTON, Turlock

[Letter to the Editor, Washington Post, Monday, Sept. 3, 2007:](#)

How to Counter Climate Change

Doug Struck's recent piece illuminated the very real problem of climate change causing a global struggle for water ["Warming May Exacerbate Global Water Conflicts," news story, Aug. 20].

The article reinforced analysis from our recent report, "Unnatural Disaster," which details how our national parks are threatened by flooding, wildfires and the loss of wildlife.

The report also warns that climate change is melting snow packs and mountain glaciers that communities such as the Central Valley in California depend on for irrigation, drinking water and power generation.

The National Parks Conservation Association recommends that to slow or halt climate change, the federal government must cut pollution from coal-fired power plants, the leading industrial emitters of greenhouse gases. The Environmental Protection Agency also needs to implement more stringent ozone standards to address poor air quality and climate change in the Central Valley.

LAURA L. WHITEHOUSE

*Central Valley Senior Program Manager
National Parks Conservation Association*