

Are Valley ozone totals exaggerated?

Statistics overinflate Valley's air issues, expert says.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

In the Modesto Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Monday, Nov. 10, 2008

The San Joaquin Valley led the nation in ozone violations this year with 127, but no one person likely experienced all those bad-air days.

That's because the total includes many days when only one or two cities had violations. On those days, most of the Valley's residents were not breathing unhealthy air.

One expert says the total exaggerates the region's pollution and health exposure.

"The number 127 is meaningless," said Joel Schwartz, a Sacramento-based analyst who studies such issues for the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C. "But this kind of number is used every year to talk about air pollution."

Fresno residents, for instance, were exposed to high ozone on 52 days. Bakersfield had 40 bad days. And in Stockton, residents saw only four bad days.

Government officials reply that Schwartz is not telling the whole story.

They say many residents in a wide area are affected when one monitor shows a violation. And the total number of violations is not the only number used to describe air quality, they said.

Industries have made the same argument about the government exaggerating pollution effects, but Schwartz has been among the most vocal and consistent critics in the past several years. The debate could take place anywhere in America, but it is perhaps most dramatic in the 25,000-square-mile Valley, the country's largest air basin.

Stockton is a case in point. As part of the San Joaquin Valley, Stockton is under the same dirty-air category as Arvin, known as the nation's smoggiest spot.

Arvin, which is 235 miles south of Stockton, had 103 ozone violations, which occur in warm weather.

But even in Stockton, businesses must invest a lot of money each year to buy the same clean-air technology for boilers or engines as the rest of the Valley.

"Regulators are in the business to find new dragons to slay," Schwartz said. "They depend on having a problem to solve."

In his book, published this year, he says air officials, environmental groups and the media often mislead the public. The book is titled "Air Quality in America: A dose of reality on air pollution levels, trends, and health risks."

Government air officials say Schwartz's view is at the opposite extreme of environmentalists who emphasize health problems and push for more regulation.

"He's selectively choosing facts and figures," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "My argument is that you have to look at the problem in its entirety."

Sadredin said that if Arvin's monitor records a violation, it means many surrounding towns and cities are having a problem, too. It isn't limited to the 16,000 people in Arvin, southeast of Bakersfield.

Officials also say that Stockton's air pollution is carried downwind to cities such as Merced.

As part of the Valley's air basin, Stockton should be a part of the air cleanup, they say.

To comply with federal standards, every Valley monitor must show that the air is within the health threshold, said Karen Magliano, chief of the air-quality data branch at the California Air Resources Board in Sacramento. Some areas will have healthy air before others.

"There is incremental success in the Valley," she said. "Some areas will come into attainment before others, but they all must come into attainment."

She said other measures of air quality indicate the Valley is showing moderate improvement. She said ozone concentrations, for instance, have been getting lower over the last several years.

Sadredin said Valley air officials often tell the public of cleanup successes in the past 15 years, preferring not to put a negative spin on the region's air quality. The Valley's air is cleaner now than it was 10 years ago.

But this year, because statewide forest fires have added so much pollution to the air, it has been difficult not to sound the alarm.

The district also has begun using the new, stricter federal standard for ozone, resulting in more violations than last year. Under the old standard, the Valley had 65 bad days last year -- which is about half the total under the new standard. So it may seem as though the air is worse.

"Everything seems to have been working against us this year," Sadredin said.

"But over the long run, there has been progress."

Health advocates and community activists said Schwartz's analysis is hard to believe. They said air pollution has contributed to a Fresno County childhood asthma rate that ranks among the highest in the state.

As a result of poor air quality, treatment of asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory illness has become an industry in the Valley, they said.

Studies have connected air pollution with lung and heart disease as well as early mortality, said Liza Bolaños, coordinator for the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, a nonprofit group representing public health and environmental organizations.

She said, "Mothers, fathers and researchers don't think the truth about the air pollution is being exaggerated."

Professor named to air quality board

By Sabra Stafford

Turlock Journal, Friday, November 7, 2008

UC Merced Professor Henry Forman, an expert in lung diseases, has been appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District.

Forman, a founding faculty member and professor of chemistry and biochemistry in the School of Natural Sciences, fills a new position on the board mandated by state legislation last year. Senate Bill 719 added four new positions to the 11-member board, including a scientist and doctor.

Forman becomes the first scientist to be appointed to the board, which was previously comprised entirely of elected officials. The board oversees air quality in eight counties.

"I'm happy to be joining the board and to help make contributions to the welfare of our society," Forman said. "My role on the board as a scientist will primarily be to make sure that their decisions are scientifically sound."

Forman has garnered an international reputation for an extensive body of research and publication on the ways the lungs react to and protect themselves from disease, including asthma, cystic fibrosis and damage from air pollutants. His expertise is especially relevant in the San Joaquin Valley, a region plagued by chronic lung disease stemming from poor air quality.

"Professor Forman brings more than 25 years of research experience and a critical scientific perspective to the deliberative work of this important body," said Chancellor Steve Kang. "I would like to congratulate him on his appointment and thank him for the contribution he will undoubtedly make to the people of the San Joaquin Valley and their quality of life."

Before joining the faculty of UC Merced in 2003, Forman was a professor and chair of the department of environmental health sciences at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. Previously he had held faculty appointments at the University of Southern California and the University of Pennsylvania in the fields of molecular pharmacology, toxicology, pediatrics, pathology and physiology.

Forman currently serves as associate editor of Free Radical Biology & Medicine, as treasurer of the International Society for Free Radical Research, and as co-director of the Lead Campus Program in Atmospheric Aerosols and Health of the University of California Toxic Substances Research and Teaching Program. He holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Queen's College in New York and a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Columbia University.

Conference aims to advance clean ag energy in the Valley

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, Nov. 7, 2008

Both those who organized and those who attended the two-day, clean-energy conference in Tulare this week agreed on one thing: They need a unified voice and a streamlined permitting process if they hope to advance the cause of agri-based clean energy in the San Joaquin Valley.

The Farming Clean Energy Conference held Wednesday and Thursday at the Edison AgTAC was the first staged by the San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization. It attracted more than 300 people over the two days.

It brought together experts in five categories: biomass, biofuels, biogas, energy efficiency and wind and solar energy.

Speakers were brought in and a series of breakout sessions were held to give primarily farmers and agri-business owners the opportunity to learn more about clean energy.

Much of the feedback from the attendees centered on barriers to progress including a complicated permitting process, endangered species, water quality, the use or conversion of ag land and the concerns of special-interest groups.

"We want to be the convener and the connector to groups like this and to provide technical assistance to farmers to help them develop their own clean-energy projects," organizer Paul Johnson said.

Ross Badertscher, an air-quality specialist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said he attended to learn more about solutions for NOX, or nitrogen oxides, which are emitted from cars and other sources of combustion.

"I don't know if biofuels are the solution for our specific valley where NOX is our main concern," he said.

The group hopes to repeat the conference next year. It is collecting the feedback from the audience and said a report will be forthcoming about the status of clean energy development in the San Joaquin Valley.

Information: www.sjvcleanenergy.org.

Farmers see money in cow manure

Waste can be converted to methane gas and sold to power companies.

By Robert Rodriguez

The Fresno Bee, Friday, November 7, 2008

TULARE -- With energy costs high and crop prices sluggish, farmers are turning to solar power, converting animal waste to natural gas and planting exotic trees to help them survive a tough economy.

Farmer and entrepreneur David Albers is among those using technology to boost revenue at his 2,800-cow dairy and that of many others.

Albers, who spoke at the first Farming Clean Energy Conference held at Southern California Edison's AgTAC Center on Wednesday, is president of BioEnergy Solutions, a company that builds facilities to extract methane gas from cow manure.

Unlike other systems that use the gas to power farm buildings, Albers' company collects it, processes it, then pumps it into a pipeline to be sold to Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

He and participating dairies benefit by getting paid for the gas while also managing their cow waste in a more environmentally friendly way.

Albers said he has contracts and or letters of intent with 100 dairies in the central San Joaquin Valley to join the project.

"It has been a tough road, and a lot of people said that this would not work, but I am happy to say we are pumping gas," said Albers, who owns Vintage Dairy in western Fresno County.

Air quality officials attending the conference spotlighted the Albers company and the use of fuel-cell technology as examples of using waste to create power without producing harmful emissions.

"This is the wave of the future," said Dave Warner, director of the permit services division for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "These two technologies will really be at the forefront."

Conference organizers said Wednesday's event was designed to demonstrate the Valley's clean energy potential while also showing off examples of successful clean energy projects and the challenges to create them.

Ray Allen, CEO of Emerald Energy, is hoping a hybrid tree called the MegaFlora will be planted by farmers as a source for biofuel.

The tree, Allen said, can be grown in the worst soil and with about eight times less water than it takes to grow corn.

Allen, a botanist and worldwide consultant, said the tree can grow 60 feet in about three years and can produce about one barrel of oil per tree.

He is working with several farmers in various parts of the state, including Stratford farmer Ceil Howe who is growing the tree in a nursery on his ranch.

"People want to know if we can grow this on land that is polluted, and the answer is 'Yes we can,' " Allen said.

Phil Erro has embraced another environmentally friendly practice on his Fresno County almond farm. He is using the sun to help grow his trees and fatten his budget. Erro installed a 28,000-watt solar photovoltaic system on his ranch to power a water pump.

He has 12 arrays with 16 panels each. Erro estimated that as much as two-thirds of the power he needs to run his pumps is solar generated.

"It has really paid off," he said.

Building the economy: Kern works to attract distribution centers

By Jenny Shearer, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Nov. 9, 2008

The IKEA distribution center at the base of the Grapevine is a temple of cardboard and shrink wrap with beeping forklifts and their cousins that glide along the smooth floor.

Tricycle-style bikes with laptops, printers and scanners track inventory among the racks.

In another area, "silos" lined with merchandise reach heights of 80 feet.

About 95 percent of the freight shipped to IKEA arrives in the ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach and Oakland.

Then trucks haul 350 to 450 containers a week to Kern, where they are processed within hours or days, depending on the shipment, by 350 to 450 workers, depending on the season.

The bustling IKEA center is just one example of the distribution and logistics operations that business leaders and the Kern Economic Development Corp. want to attract here to bolster the economy.

The jobs offer reliable paychecks and opportunities for advancement, said Richard Chapman, KEDC's president and chief executive.

Kern's vacancy rate for industrial space with 50,000 square feet or more is a healthy 3.9 percent, said Eric Powers, executive vice president of NAI Capital Commercial. He's in negotiations with tenants looking for 300,000 square feet to 4 million square feet.

WHAT WE HAVE

Kern has scored other successes in this area.

An Oneida distribution center is next to IKEA. A 350,000-square-foot facility for Famous Footwear is under construction and will likely open in spring 2009.

Target and Sears have distribution centers in Shafter and Delano, respectively.

So far, about 3.3 million square feet of the approved 20 million square feet at the Tejon Industrial Complex is developed, said Barry Hibbard, vice president of commercial and industrial development at Tejon Ranch.

"We have a ways to go. It's a 10-year plus or minus plan. It really depends on the market," he said.

When it's built out, Hibbard said, 6,000 people will work at centers there.

WHY KERN?

Kern is an attractive home for logistics because of our location, with the twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to the south and Oakland to the north.

County distribution centers can bring in products from both, and Highway 58 connects with Interstate 40 in Barstow.

That's the primary truck route in the United States, Hibbard said.

A second plus for Kern is trucks headed to Sacramento and San Diego can leave Kern and return the same day.

"We are competitively right in the middle of that in an uncongested area," Hibbard said.

Ontario is among one of the biggest industrial space markets in the nation. But about 25 years ago, the Inland Empire transitioned from an agricultural-based economy to manufacturing, light assembly and logistics.

"We have a very similar labor force today that they did," Hibbard said.

Agricultural laborers are desirable because they are conscientious and familiar with equipment used in warehouses more so than the general population.

These automated facilities are more than big square boxes and require more workers than people realize, said Jon DeCesare, president of World Class Logistics Consulting in Long Beach.

Years ago, a company's supply chain wasn't viewed as it is today. But then Wal-Mart showed the world a sophisticated supply system creates a competitive advantage. The retailer lowered costs of delivering products and got merchandise at the right time to the right place, DeCesare said.

EFFICIENT OPERATIONS

IKEA's facility, adjacent to Interstate 5, serves 16 stores in the West and holds 242,000 pallets, said Edrico Oliver, the distribution center manager.

The goal is to run it as efficiently as possible.

Inside, amid all the boxes, a child's bedroom display includes a bright blue bed, stuffed frogs and turtles and fabric leaves that look like big pea pods jutting out from a painted wall. Scenes like this are spaced throughout the mile-long warehouse.

"At the end of the day, the bottom line is it's all about the customer," Oliver said. "We show the co-workers it's more than a corrugated box."

Hibbard said the goal is to ensure trucks are full going both ways, but that's not happening yet. For example, if a container comes to Kern with IKEA furniture, "let's make sure it's full going out with agricultural products," he said.

ON THE ROAD

Trucks that move goods raise pollution concerns.

About 78,000 trucks, including those that stop at distribution centers, trek through the valley each year and emit nitrogen oxide, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"NOX is the primary culprit for our ozone and particulate problems in the San Joaquin Valley," said Sayed Sadredin, the district's executive director. Kern's geography and topography don't help, either.

But diesel engines are becoming cleaner, and there's demand for the technology. The district received \$160 million in Proposition 1B funds to dole out during a four-year period.

It awarded \$40 million so far but received \$130 million in grant applications, Sadredin said.

The California Air Resources Board will consider adopting regulations to reduce diesel truck emissions in December.

What's missing is data about where the goods that come into the county go, said Robert Phipps, an administrative analyst at the Kern Council of Governments, a planning and transportation agency.

In May, Kern and San Bernardino partnered to survey about 6,000 drivers along 58. Those findings should be ready by the first of the year.

This week, the council will survey truckers using I-5 and Highway 99 about their destinations. That data will be available in early summer, he said.

Major housing tract west of Hwy. 99 gains planners' OK

By Russell Clemings

The Fresno Bee, Friday, November 7, 2008

Even with the local housing market at a standstill, one of the area's biggest builders is making plans for a big new tract west of Highway 99.

The McCaffrey Group won approval Wednesday night from the Fresno Planning Commission to build 648 homes on about 127 acres bounded by Hayes, Bryan, Ashlan and Gettysburg avenues.

The project won praise from commissioners for its design, which melds higher-than-usual density with amenities such as narrower streets and wider sidewalks to encourage walking and biking over driving.

Some of the tract's lots will have garages that open onto alleys. Front doors for those homes will open onto courtyards instead of streets.

Getting builders to put more houses on less land and discourage driving is a long-term goal of local and regional planners. Such steps are intended to stop farmland loss and restrain the growth of air pollution from motor vehicles.

"I love this project for the walkability, for the pedestrian access, for the way it creates open space in a unique way," Commissioner Lori Cherry said just before the panel's unanimous vote.

Commissioner Nat DiBudo praised the tract's mix of large and small homes on lots ranging from 2,706 to 16,307 square feet: "I can start in as a young couple with a smaller home, move up, then move all the way back down." He said that will let growing families find more space without changing schools.

The site lies east of the Koligian Educational Center in the Central Unified School District, in an area where most roads are still narrow two-lane affairs intended to serve farms and rural home sites. As a result, the tract will be required to pay about \$110,000 toward improvements at the Shaw and Ashlan Highway 99 interchanges.

It is also to contribute more than \$773,000 toward a new Highway 99 interchange at Veterans Boulevard between Shaw and Herndon avenues. The cost of that interchange is estimated at \$97 million, with \$60 million to come from Measure C, Fresno County's half-cent transportation sales tax. Part of the remainder is expected to come from fees on new development.

First wood burning ban in Fresno issued for today

By Sentinel Staff

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, Nov. 7, 2008

FRESNO -- The season's first fireplace and wood stove burning ban was scheduled for today in Fresno County through midnight tonight. Kings and Tulare Counties were not part of this ban, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Daily wood-burning forecasts are available at 4:30 p.m. daily on-line at <http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm>, or by calling 1-800 SMOG INFO (766-4463).

Air district forbids burning in Fresno Co.

The Fresno Bee, Friday, November 7, 2008

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued Fresno County's first fireplace and wood stove prohibition of the season for today, spokeswoman Janelle Schneider said.

It will be in effect through midnight tonight. Deteriorating air quality is cited as the reason for the ban, which applies to burning wood, pellets and manufactured fire logs.

The Check Before You Burn program runs from Nov. 1 through the last day of February, and aims to reduce wintertime particulate pollution. Forecasts are issued on a county-by-county basis.

This year, Schneider said, more prohibitions are expected because the threshold for bans is lower. Also, there are now just two levels of wood-burning forecast: "wood burning prohibited" or "please burn cleanly," depending on expected air quality.

There are two exceptions to the ban: if the residence does not have access to natural-gas service or if burning solid fuel is the sole source of heat for the residence. Prohibition violations may be subject to fines.

Daily wood-burning forecasts are available each day at 4:30 p.m. at <http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm>, or by calling (800) SMOG INFO.

Party tussle ensnares Obama's global warming goals

By Dina Cappiello

In the Washington Post, Fresno Bee and other papers, Saturday, November 8, 2008

WASHINGTON -- Democrats are fighting over control of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the outcome could affect President-elect Obama's efforts to limit the heat-trapping gases blamed for global warming.

Obama has said he wants to act quickly on climate change. But bipartisan support could be tested if liberal California Rep. Henry Waxman unseats the chairman, Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich.

The committee's top Democrat for 28 years, Dingell is an ally of important of automakers and electric utilities.

The committee will take the lead on legislation to cap greenhouse gases and establish a multibillion-dollar market in carbon dioxide. Companies would buy and sell the right to pollute.

Last month, Dingell and Rep. Rick Boucher, D-Va., released a draft of a global warming bill for reducing greenhouse gases by 80 percent by 2050. That reduction is in line with what Obama has proposed.

Environmentalists and some liberal Democrats, however, see Dingell as an obstacle to stricter fuel economy standards for cars and trucks and cleaner fuels, as Obama also has advocated. They see in Waxman, whose district includes Beverly Hills, an opportunity to push through a more ambitious environmental agenda now that Democrats have expanded their majorities in Congress and will take over the White House.

Dingell's supporters say his legislation has a better chance of winning support from some Republicans and conservative Democrats, many of them on his 57-member committee, because it slowly reduces emissions to buy time for the technology to develop.

Liberals and environmentalists complain that Dingell's bill could pre-empt states such as California that have set up their own carbon trading systems and bar the Environmental Protection Agency and state agencies from setting auto mileage standards different from the Transportation Department's.

"The prospects for success will be much better under Chairman Dingell on this issue and many others," said Boucher, who heads the subcommittee on air quality.

Rep. Mike Doyle, D-Pa., who was working the phones to drum up support for Dingell, said claims by Waxman's supporters that Dingell would not advance climate legislation quickly were "not based in reality."

"This climate change bill is not a slam dunk," said Doyle. "It is not like we have overwhelming votes in the House and Senate."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., have not taken sides. Obama's camp is also staying out of it.

But it wouldn't be the first time Dingell has sparred with Pelosi or Waxman, a close ally of the speaker.

In 2002, Pelosi supported Dingell's opponent in the Michigan primary. Last year, in a move that was viewed as undercutting Dingell's committee jurisdiction on the global warming issue, she created a special panel led by liberal Massachusetts Rep. Edward Markey to make the case for bigger reductions in greenhouse gases.

Waxman this year signed onto legislation with Markey that would ban any new coal-fired power plants built without technology to capture carbon dioxide. Dingell favors a more tempered approach. He has signaled his support for a bill advanced by Boucher that would establish a \$1 billion annual fund generated by fees on electricity generation to develop carbon capture technology.

Neither Dingell nor Waxman would comment directly about the tussle. Each side claimed to have enough votes among Democrats for the committee's top spot.

In a letter to members of the committee, Dingell did not refer to Waxman and cited Pelosi: "The country must be governed from the middle."

Waxman, 69, has headed the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee that has spent the past two years taking the Bush administration to task over global warming and muzzling government scientists. It has also investigated the White House's political operation, steroids in sports and, most recently, abuses behind the financial collapse.

He wrote a global warming bill last year that attracted 155 co-sponsors, all Democrats, well below the 218 needed to pass the House.

Bush officials plan to dial back environmental protections

By Renee Schoof

In the Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and other papers, Sunday, November 9, 2008

In the next few weeks, the Bush administration is expected to relax environmental-protection rules on power plants near national parks, uranium mining near the Grand Canyon and more mountaintop-removal coal mining in Appalachia.

The administration is widely expected to try to get some of the rules into final form by the week before Thanksgiving because, in some cases, there's a 60-day delay before new regulations take effect. And once the rules are in place, undoing them generally would be a more time-consuming job for the next Congress and administration.

The regulations already have had periods of public comment, and no further comments are being taken. The administration has proposed the rules and final approval is considered likely.

It's common for administrations to issue a spate of regulations just before leaving office. The Bush administration's changes are in keeping with President Bush's overall support of deregulation.

Here's a look at some changes that are likely to go into effect before the inauguration.

GRAND CANYON

Higher prices for uranium, driven by expanded interest in nuclear power, have resulted in thousands of mining claims being filed on land within three miles of the Grand Canyon.

The House of Representatives and Senate natural resources committees have the authority under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to order emergency withdrawals of federal land from future mining claims for three years, while Congress decides whether a permanent ban is needed. The House committee issued such a withdrawal order in June for about 1 million acres near the Grand Canyon, including the land the claims were filed on.

Now the Department of Interior has proposed scrapping its own rule that puts such orders from the congressional committees into practice.

The Interior Department could decide to use its own power to halt new claims, but it doesn't see any emergency that would prompt such action, department spokesman Chris Paolino said. The department would require environmental impact studies before it approved any mining on the claims, he added.

One of the main hazards from uranium mining is seepage from tailings piles that poisons water. A report for the Arizona Department of Game and Fish said people would be at risk if they ingested radium-226, arsenic and other hazardous substances from water and tainted fish.

Environmental groups say the government must consider the possible danger of uranium leaching into the Colorado River, a source of drinking water for Phoenix, Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano in March urged Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne to halt new claims and order a study of uranium mining near the canyon.

MOUNTAINTOP-REMOVAL COAL MINING

Another proposed rule change from the Department of Interior would change rules on dumping the earth removed for mining into nearby streams.

The current rule, dating from the Reagan administration, says that no surface mining may occur within 100 feet of a stream unless there'd be no harm to water quality or quantity. The rule change essentially would eliminate the buffer by allowing the government to grant waivers so that mining companies can dump the rubble from mountaintops into valleys, burying streams.

The new rule would let companies explain why they can't avoid dumping into streams and how they intend to minimize harm. A September report on the proposal by the department's Office of Surface Mining said that environmental concerns would be taken into account "to the extent possible, using the best technology currently available."

The government and mining companies have been ignoring the buffer since the 1990s, said Joan Mulhern, an attorney with Earthjustice, a nonprofit law firm for environmental protection.

Before the rule can be changed, however, the Department of Interior must get written approval from Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen Johnson.

"In order to concur, the EPA would have to find that the activities authorized by the rule would not violate water-quality standards, and all the evidence is to the contrary," Mulhern said.

AIR POLLUTION

Two rule changes would apply to electric power plants and other stationary sources of air pollution.

The first mainly concerns older power plants. Under the Clean Air Act, plants that are updated must install pollution-control technology if they'll produce more emissions. The rule change would allow plants to measure emissions on an hourly basis, rather than their total yearly output. This way, plants could run for more hours and increase overall emissions without exceeding the threshold that would require additional pollution controls.

The other change would make it easier for companies to build polluting facilities near national parks and wilderness areas. It also would change the way that companies must measure the impact of their pollution.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

The Endangered Species Act prohibits any federal actions that would jeopardize the existence of a listed species or "adversely modify" critical habitats. The 1973 law has helped save species such as the bald eagle from extinction.

Bush administration officials have argued that the act can't be used to protect animals and habitats from climate change by regulating specific sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

A proposed rule change would allow federal agencies to decide for themselves whether timber sales, new dams or other projects harm wildlife protected under the act. In many cases, they'd no longer have to consult the agencies that are charged with administering the Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

OTHERS

Among the rule changes and plans that might become final are commercial oil-shale leasing, a new rule that would allow loaded, concealed weapons in some national parks, and oil and gas leasing on wild public lands in West Virginia and Utah.

State announces end to fire season in three counties

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, November 6, 2008

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection declared an end Tuesday to the 2008 fire season in its Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit.

With the close of fire season, Cal Fire will transition to winter staffing, releasing seasonal firefighters and closing some remote wildland fire stations in those counties.

On Monday, the department reduced residential burning restrictions within state responsibility areas of the same three Northern California counties.

Both actions were due to recent rain and cooler weather, according to a Cal Fire news release.

Residents still must obtain a burn permit and follow its requirements, including burning only on days determined by each local air pollution control district.

In Truckee, burning is allowed only during daylight hours to minimize smoke complaints due to nighttime inversions.

Cal Fire officials warn that home fires often occur in winter because of dangerous heating equipment or unsafe practices and urge residents to follow these safety tips:

- Never use flammable liquids or excessive amounts of paper to start or accelerate a fire.
- Charcoal gives off lethal amounts of carbon monoxide. Do not burn it indoors.
- Keep flammables away from heat sources.
- The use of kerosene heaters inside the home is prohibited in California.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Keep children away from heat sources.

More fire safety tips are available at the Cal Fire Web site at www.fire.ca.gov.

California bullet train's win is first fiscal step

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, November 06, 2008

After a decade stuck in the station, California's bullet train dreams got a huge boost this week when voters approved Proposition 1A, the \$10 billion construction bond measure.

Supporters hailed the vote as putting California at the forefront nationally on alternative transportation.

Bullet trains, they say, will allow travelers to speed from the north state to the south in nearly two hours at 200 miles per hour – bypassing congested airports and freeways.

"The people of California are smart enough to realize we need to invest in our future," High Speed Rail Authority executive Mehdi Morshed said. "Despite the economic bad news, they are thinking beyond today."

Not everyone is on board, a vote analysis shows.

The narrow victory was led by voters in areas where trains are expected to arrive first – San Francisco, San Jose, Los Angeles, and Central Valley areas eager for the economic growth the trains are predicted to bring.

But a majority in Sacramento and San Diego opposed the measure, as did voters in El Dorado, Placer and outlying counties.

Sacramento and San Diego are scheduled to be part of a second-phase expansion of high-speed rail, after an initial line is built between the Bay Area and Los Angeles.

Rail advocates acknowledge bullet trains are unlikely to reach Sacramento and San Diego for another 15 years, and not unless trains on the initial segment earn enough money to finance expansion.

Morshed said his agency hopes to begin building medium-speed starter lines between San Francisco and San Jose, and between Los Angeles and Anaheim in the next few years.

Those lines get first priority, he said, because local agencies – Caltrain in the Bay Area and Metrolink in Los Angeles – signed agreements to chip in money.

Ultimately, Tuesday's \$10 billion bond measure is expected to pay for less than one-quarter of the 800-mile system's cost. The rest of the funds are expected to come from federal grants, local matching funds and private-sector investors.

Morshed said he expects the full system to be done by 2025.

Opponents, lead by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, argue the train plan is ill-conceived and point out the state has yet to update its 8-year-old business plan, as required by law.

"It is mind-boggling, with the budget crisis, that people would vote for this without there being a business plan," Jarvis group head Jonathan Coupal said.

Bullet train campaign officials said the plan is due out Friday, but it won't contain anything of note that hasn't already been made public.

Train campaign officials ran \$1 million worth of radio ads promoting the system as more than just a transportation tool.

"We knew people were concerned about congestion, air pollution, about oil dependence, and concerned about jobs," spokesman Greg Larsen said. "The high speed train responds to each of those concerns."

Kevin Powers, 22, a recent UC Davis graduate, said he voted for the rail system, citing environmental concerns among other reasons.

"State population is going to grow to 50 million," he said. "What we have isn't going to work."

Wayne Steving, 65, of Rancho Murieta, voted against the train.

"It's too high of a cost at this time," he said. "We need it, but we just don't have any money. We're broke."

High-speed rail agency executive Morshed said the state will now seek federal funding to help on the initial segments, and will work on securing right-of-way.

Bullet train's passage eases environmental defeats of Props. 7, 10

By Chris Bowman

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, November 06, 2008

The resounding defeat of two state ballot initiatives pitched as clean-energy solutions to climate change doesn't mean Californians' support for renewable and [alternative fuels](#) has softened, environmental leaders said Wednesday.

If that were true, voters also would have rejected a \$10 billion bond to build a bullet train linking Northern and Southern California, said Bernadette Del Chiaro, an advocate for Environment California.

"Californians are keenly interested in promoting real, big and bold clean-energy solutions as demonstrated by their willingness to pass Prop. 1A," Chiaro said, referring to the high-speed rail bond that won by four points.

About 65 percent of voters struck down Proposition 7, a measure to mandate greater use of renewable energy sources. Proposition 10, which asked voters to borrow \$5 billion to help companies and consumers buy environmentally friendly vehicles, was opposed by 60 percent of voters.

Proponents of Proposition 7 called Tuesday's defeat a "missed opportunity" to take "a giant step forward in the fight for clean energy." Representatives of leading environmental groups that opposed the measure called it "a false start" and "unwelcomed distraction."

"Californians want more renewable energy powering our economy, but want it done right," said Cliff Chen, an energy analyst with the environmentalists Union of Concerned Scientists.

Proposition 7 would have require public and privately owned utilities in the state to get at least half their electricity from clean, renewable sources, such as wind, solar and geothermal, by 2025. Law now requires only privately owned utilities, such as Pacific Gas and Electric Co., to generate 20 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2010.

Major environmental groups, renewable power companies and other opponents argued that the measure was poorly drafted and would have had the unintended effect of delaying rather than accelerating use of renewable power. The environmentalists were oddly aligned with the very utilities they have been needing to reduce fossil fuel consumption – PG&E, Edison International (Southern California Edison) and Sempra Energy (San Diego Gas & Electric).

The utilities raised nearly \$30 million in opposition while about \$8 million was spent promoting the proposition – most of it from Arizona billionaire Peter Sperling, whose wealth comes from the for-profit University of Phoenix colleges.

The defeat of Proposition 7 probably will put more pressure on the Legislature to overhaul state energy policies in favor of cleaner-burning power plants.

Spokesmen for both sides said they are lining up support for legislation next session to require utilities to get at least 33 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020 in the fight against global warming, as state utility and energy commissions have recommended.

Forest Service unveils plan to fight climate change

By Tom Knudson

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, November 08, 2008

RENO – U.S. Forest Service Chief Gail Kimbell unveiled on Friday a new agencywide effort to tackle the problem of climate change, saying it poses the greatest danger yet to the nation's woodlands.

"This issue is so big," Kimbell said in an interview at the national convention of the Society of American Foresters here. "The health and resilience of America's forests affect everyone."

The goal is to respond to climate change broadly, she said, from helping forests adapt to warmer, drier conditions to reducing the agency's carbon footprint by stepping up its purchase of [alternative fuel vehicles](#).

Though short on specifics, the agency's plan – unveiled at the convention on Friday – comes against a backdrop of declining forest health and increasing environmental damage from wildfires across the Sierra Nevada and the mountain West, Kimbell said.

"We've been seeing bigger fires, wilder fires, more intense fires," she said. "Fire seasons that start in January in the southern United States end in December in California – and then start all over again."

"We believe it's tied to ... climate change," Kimbell added.

Insects, too, take advantage of warmer conditions to wreak havoc on conifer stands in the northern Rockies, she said.

The Society of American Foresters is the nation's leading scientific and educational organization for the forestry profession. Its Reno conference, titled "Forestry in a Climate of Change," brought together forestry professionals and academics.

"The problem is not climate change," said conference-goer John Helms, past president of the society and a retired UC Berkeley forestry professor. "The problem is the rate of climate change. We are increasing the rate of change faster than normal evolutionary processes."

One cornerstone of the Forest Service plan – which the agency calls a "Strategic Framework for Climate Change" – relies heavily on science to shape agency decisions. Another calls for developing strategies to help forests soak up and store more carbon dioxide, the atmospheric gas most responsible for global warming.

"This is a much different issue than we or other agencies have grappled with," said David Cleaves, the Forest Service's associate deputy chief for research and development. "We need to do it right."

Opinion in the Sacramento Bee, Friday, November 07, 2008:

Carbon bank demands an honest accountant

California's forests have always been an important part of our heritage and our daily lives. We rely on them for water, wood and recreation. We are likely to rely on them even more as a powerful resource to help combat climate change.

Recent polls indicate that almost 90 percent of Californians support protecting forests because they naturally remove global warming pollution from the atmosphere. The good news is that the state's Air Resources Board, charged with implementing California's landmark global warming policy, wisely included forests among the sectors that must help the state meet its targets for reducing carbon dioxide, the primary global warming pollutant.

The board's challenge is to ensure that the true climate benefits of forests are accounted for accurately, realistically and over time. Getting these numbers right is the key to success. Failure to do so will have serious consequences for our forests – and the climate benefits that we need from them.

Forests have a natural role in regulating our climate and can be managed like a growing, long-term "carbon bank." They use photosynthesis to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and sequester, or hold, it as carbon for very long periods of time. The older forests are, the more carbon they hold. That is why California's legendary redwood and Sierra forests are some of the best carbon banks in the world.

Keeping track of forest carbon requires double-entry bookkeeping: Trees absorb carbon through photosynthesis when they grow. But when trees are cut down faster than they grow back and forests are cleared for development, most of that stored carbon is released back into the atmosphere, and our bank is depleted.

In other words, depleting our forests actually contributes dramatically to climate change. In fact, forest loss and depletion is the second largest source of global carbon emissions.

The board's current plan rightly recognizes the value of our forests as carbon banks by proposing a target of "no net loss" of forest carbon while seeking to increase net savings in our carbon banks. The plan also recognizes that forests have a role in meeting climate goals in other sectors, like land-use, construction and energy.

The fact that many sectors rely on forests presents an accounting challenge. For example, right now the plan only addresses the climate benefits of burning wood as a low-carbon biomass fuel in the energy sector without taking into account the climate cost of harvesting that wood in the forest sector.

It's like having a family checkbook, where different family members can write checks from the same account – in this case, the same carbon storage bank. Someone needs to know what everyone is drawing from the account in order to maintain a healthy balance and ensure that we don't exceed the limit.

When it meets Nov. 20 to finalize the plan for implementing Assembly Bill 32, the Air Resources Board should add provisions for much tighter accounting for all forest-related climate costs and benefits. They must require that any impacts on forests' carbon banks are accurately tracked across different sectors, like the family checkbook, so we can track unwanted withdrawals. This will give us "accounting with accountability" and the ability to clearly identify the causes of unexpected gains or losses and to respond accordingly with forest management that maximizes climate benefits and minimizes losses.

The plan also needs to take a long-term view. Forests increase their carbon stores as they get older, much like compound interest in a bank account. Clearing our forests to generate more products, like woody biomass, might look like a big win for climate in the first few years. But when we factor in the long-term, compounded impact of lost carbon storage, it's likely a climate disaster.

Conserving and restoring our forests using sustainable management that increases carbon stores over time should be central to California's efforts at healing the climate. But using fuzzy math to calculate the climate impact of forests won't just cook the books – it will cook our planet.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Monday, Nov. 10, 2008:](#)

Bush pays back big biz donors

President Bush has had his staff drawing up deregulation rules for the past few months on a variety of topics from release of carbon into the air, relaxing coal burning limitations, relaxation of coal mining rules, easing of water pollution rules and degrading protection for endangered species.

His plan is to enact deregulations by proclamation (executive order) and Congress will not be interested in what Bush does after the election, as a good number of them may be leaving. The period for reversing any declaration is 60 days, which will expire on Bush's watch and the results will take months or years of legislative wrangling to reverse. In the end, America suffers because Bush is paying back the big business interests who put him in office. One more act proving that he cares not for the people of America, only for big business donors to his campaigns.

Ron Jeske, Modesto

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses President Elect Obama considers Robert Kennedy Jr. as national administrator for EPA. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Considera presidente electo Obama a Robert Kennedy Jr., para la EPA

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, November 07, 2008

El presidente electo, Barack Obama considera nombrar a Robert Kennedy junior como administrador nacional de la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental, la EPA, de acuerdo con reportes de la estructura de administración del mandatario.

Kennedy se ha destacado como activista que demanda limpieza de agua potable en la ciudad de Nueva York.

También es el abogado representante de la organización ambientalista Riverkeeper, del noreste del país.

Desde los años noventas, Kennedy ha defendido la protección ecológica en debates del congreso.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Californians approve high-speed rail project.](#)

Aprobó California proyecto de tren de alta velocidad

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, November 06, 2008

El electorado de California aprobó un proyecto de construcción de tren de alta velocidad que ayudará a disminuir el uso de vehículos y su consecuente contaminación ambiental.

El proyecto costará unos diez mil millones de dólares pero tendrá un itinerario que incluye a todas las mayores ciudades en California con un precio accesible a usuarios.

El tren fue la única propuesta ambientalista aprobada en la elección. Las proposiciones 7 y 10, de energía alternativa y combustibles y vehículos anticontaminantes fueron rechazadas en las urnas.