

Not a trace of tire fire left on Westley property

By ALEJANDRA NAVARRO, MODESTO BEE STAFF WRITER, October 3, 2002

More than three years after lightning ignited a mountain of 7 million tires on a ranch near Westley, soil is visible again on the rolling foothills on Stanislaus County's West Side.

County officials reported this week that all the tires, debris and ash had been removed from the site.

The fire started Sept. 22, 1999, in the pile of used tires and burned for a little more than a month.

The California Integrated Waste Management Board spent about

\$11 million to remove 200,000 tons of debris in a project that began in December. The debris total does not include tires that were removed before the most recent contract.

"I am very pleased with the timeliness of the cleanup," said Sonya Harrigfeld, assistant director of the county Department of Environmental Resources.

She noted the challenges of removing the debris and contaminated soil. "You never know what you're going to run into," she said.

She cited an example of poor records showing where tires had been buried on the property. The contractor used detection equipment to find unburned tires underground that needed to be removed.

The contractor is now recontouring the land to its original state, which will help with storm runoff, she said. The Integrated Waste Management Board plans to pay for the planting of native grasses to help control erosion.

State officials will continue to keep an eye on groundwater, through the use of monitoring wells that will show if contaminants are migrating outside the fire area.

Westley resident Grace Cox was glad to see pictures of the cleared site, though she and other area residents have not been allowed in.

"It is a very big job, and the state agencies have done much of the work," Cox said. "But that means you and I are paying for it. That annoys me."

Harrigfeld said a community meeting is planned in December, with participation by the Integrated Waste Management Board, the state Department of Toxic Substance Control and the Regional Water Quality Control Board, which worked together on the cleanup.

County supervisors asked if the electric-generating tire-burning plant next to the fire site would operate again.

"The likelihood of the plant being restarted is very slim," Harrigfeld said.

Community Briefs, Modesto Bee:

DAIRY REGULATIONS

Merced postpones action

The Merced County Board of Supervisors has delayed final approval of a new dairy ordinance for the second time. If approved, the ordinance would place much tougher environmental standards on existing dairies and livestock operations. New dairies would face more stringent -- and potentially costly -- regulations. The ordinance stipulates longer distances between new housing and existing dairies and vice versa. The board will take up the issue again in about three weeks, board Chairman Joe Rivero said.-- Michael Mello

Merced Sun-Star Correction, October 3, 2002:

A Kings County supervisor's name was misspelled in Wednesday's paper. The correct spelling is Tony Barba.

Also, if the Central Valley air basin is found to be in "extreme" non-compliance with federal Clean Air Act requirements, businesses emitting 10 tons per year – not 10 tons per day – of ozone-creating pollutants will need permits.

Merced Sun-Star editorial, October 3, 2002:

Splitting pollution district a bad idea

The present mechanism for trying to clean up the air in the San Joaquin Valley is less than ideal. It relies on politicians to get the job done, and that is generally not a good idea, which explains why our air continues to be so bad. (Relying on politicians for anything is always risky.)

That said, however, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is all we have at the moment, and so it's in everybody's best interests to try to make it as effective as possible.

With that thought in mind, we therefore suggest that all eight counties in the district need to hang together in an attempt to clean up the air in the Central Valley.

San Joaquin County officials asked for and recently received a study that looks into the possibility of the three northern counties – San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced – abandoning the other five counties.

The study came up with three scenarios. The northern counties could form their own air district, or they could join with the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District or the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

The idea of forming a separate air district is identical to one floated last February by Assemblywoman Barbara Matthews, D-Tracy.

Her concern, and the concern of San Joaquin County officials, is that the northern three counties would have to share in the pain that results from the Valley's air district not cleaning up our air. The pain could include higher costs for businesses that pollute, curtailed economic growth and perhaps even federal sanctions such as a freeze in federal highway funds.

When Matthews first floated her idea, we said in this space that we think it's a bad idea, and we gave several reasons. First, Merced County air is polluted. Second, splitting up the air district would give the five southern counties less political muscle in their efforts to clean up the air. And third, pulling out of the Valley air district would be taking the moral low ground. We said that, because air pollutants travel south through the Valley, meaning that part of the problems experienced in the southern Valley can be traced right back to pollution in the northern counties, including, of course, Merced County.

Those concerns still exist with respect to establishing a new air district, and so we still think it's a bad idea.

Furthermore:

* Setting up a new district for the three northern counties would require the establishment of another bureaucracy, which, as we all know, would mean a new commitment of tax dollars. The Valley air district has an annual budget of about \$34.2 million, and it has 233 employee positions. We doubt the cost and the work force would drop significantly if the three counties pulled out, and we seriously doubt they would drop enough to offset the costs and staffing for a new district.

* Breaking the three counties off would not solve the Valley air pollution problem. In fact, a split could make the problem worse. As a spokesman for the California Air Resources Board noted the other day, the northern counties, with their relatively lower levels of pollution, might attract more polluters, and the result could be additional pollution not only in the three northern counties, but also in the five southern counties.

We also don't like the idea of the three counties being blended into other air districts, because San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties are in the Central Valley air basin and have more in common with the five southern counties than they do with counties in other areas. In other words, putting the three into other districts would amount to nothing more than a cosmetic adjustment.

Merced County Supervisor Jerry O'Banion, who sits on the board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, shares at least some of our concerns, and when asked about the recent San Joaquin County study, he said he doesn't think much of it. Referring to the counties in the air basin, he added, "We're all in this together."

Precisely. Good for O' Banion.

Kings County Supervisor Tony Barba, who is also an air district board member, feels much the same way. He notes that Kings County, south of Fresno, is at the "bottom of the (air pollution) hole," and he said, "I think that we should stick together."

Again, we agree.

Kim Kloeb, a senior planner with the San Joaquin Council of Governments, said the study was intended as a way of bringing the facts together, and he added that there will be more discussion. He said, "Honestly, I don't know where we'll go from here."

We know where we would like the study to go. We'd like it to wind up on a shelf somewhere, gathering an inch of dust before it's discarded years from now.

The counties of the Central Valley absolutely must stick together, because, as O'Banion says, "We're all in this together."

Splitting the three northern counties off is a bad idea that will not solve our air pollution problem, and it could, in fact, make it even worse.

Valley gains rail split

Davis OKs rail agency; vetoes 2nd Valley seat

By Jake Henshaw, Visalia Times-Delta Sacramento Bureau, October 3, 2002

SACRAMENTO -- After signing the \$9.95 billion bond for a California bullet train, Gov. Gray Davis rendered a split decision on two other bills affecting the massive rail project.

Davis signed one measure to establish a permanent agency to take charge of the high-speed train project and vetoed another that would have given the San Joaquin Valley a greater say in the agency's work.

Senate Bill 796 by Sen. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, was signed to eliminate the shutdown date of Dec. 31, 2003, for the High-Speed Rail Authority, thus making the agency permanent.

The governor vetoed SB1799, which would have required that at least two members of the nine-member board of this authority be San Joaquin Valley residents.

"While I agree that the San Joaquin Valley should be fairly represented on the High Speed Rail Authority, I cannot support a measure that constrains my flexibility in making appointments," Davis said in his veto message.

Current law requires the governor to consider the state's geographic diversity in making appointments to the rail authority to ensure that all regions are adequately represented, without identifying any specific region, according to a legislative analysis of AB1799.

Right now, there is one Valley member on the board, and there have been three at different times since the authority was created in 1996, according to Sen. Charles Poochigian, R-Fresno, the author of SB1799.

"Hopefully this bill has sent a clear message that the San Joaquin Valley is severely underrepresented on this governing board and that residents here are now paying attention," Poochigian said.

The rail authority was responsible for the proposed project's plan, which calls for a 700-mile system for trains capable of traveling at speeds of more than 200 miles per hour through the San Joaquin Valley connecting Northern and Southern California.

Most of the \$9.95 billion bond, which must be approved by voters in 2004, would make a major downpayment on the \$12 billion cost of the first 400-mile phase of the project.

Supporters have said the rest of the money for the initial phase likely would come from federal, private and other nonstate sources.

The bond includes \$950 million for improvements to existing conventional trains.

Davis vetoes bill on high-speed rail project

Measure would have boosted Valley representation

By Will Shuck, Record Capitol Bureau Chief, October 3, 2002

SACRAMENTO -- Three days after Gov. Gray Davis said he wouldn't "treat the Central Valley as a second-class citizen" and said the region "has a seat at the table," he vetoed a bill that would have given the Valley more say on a multibillion-dollar high-speed rail plan.

[Davis made his pro-Valley remarks Friday when he signed a bill that will require Bay Area motorists to submit their vehicles to the same stringent smog tests as Valley drivers. The measure is designed to limit the amount of pollution that blows inland from the coast.](#)

Then Sunday, the governor vetoed Senate Bill 1799 by Sen. Charles Poochigian, R-Fresno. The measure would have required that Valley residents hold two seats on the nine-member California High Speed Rail Authority Board.

The board will oversee construction of a proposed 270-mile high-speed rail line through the Valley linking Northern and Southern California. Davis signed a bill earlier that will place a \$10 billion bond measure for the project before voters in November 2004.

Poochigian said that even though the bond measure could bring "very serious transportation and development implication (to) this region, ... the San Joaquin Valley is severely underrepresented on this governing board."

There are five members from the Bay Area, three from Southern California and one from the Valley.

Explaining his reason for vetoing Poochigian's bill, Davis wrote: "While I agree that the San Joaquin Valley should be fairly represented on the High Speed Rail Authority, I cannot support a measure that constrains my flexibility in making appointments."

Davis spokeswoman Hilary McLean said the veto does not diminish the governor's earlier remarks about the Valley.

"The governor considers the Central Valley a full partner in California's overall success," she said. "And on the other hand, he has been very consistent throughout his term in office in resisting constraints on his appointment authority."

Davis recently rejected a measure that would have dictated the makeup of the state Board of Education, a bill that also would have limited his appointment choices.

The High Speed Rail Authority was created in 1996. It has authority to determine the routes and stops of the proposed system and to approve environmental-impact studies related to the building and operation of the rail line.

The board came under media glare a few weeks back when its chairman solicited support for Davis' re-election committee from the companies that would profit from construction of a new rail system. Davis, already defending himself from accusations that he too closely links policy decisions with fund raising, canceled a planned fund-raiser and returned checks to the rail-related donors.

* To reach Capitol Bureau Chief Will Shuck, phone **(916) 441-4078** or e-mail **sacto@recordnet.com**

Valley rail representation suffers blow

Fresno Bee Capitol Bureau, October 3, 2002

SACRAMENTO -- Gov. Davis has rejected legislation that would have guaranteed Valley representation on the state's High Speed Rail Authority. SB 1799, sponsored by Sen. Chuck Poochigian, R-Fresno, would have required that at least two of the nine-member panel overseeing the development of a bullet-train system be residents of the San Joaquin Valley.

Two weeks ago, Davis approved legislation that will place a \$9.9 billion bond measure on the November 2004 ballot, to build the first phase of high-speed rail.

Nearly 300 miles of the planned 700-mile system would run through the Valley. Currently, only one member of the authority is a local resident -- Fran Florez of Shafter. Five members are from the Bay Area and the remaining three are from Southern California.

In a one-line veto message, Davis wrote, "While I agree that the San Joaquin Valley should be fairly represented on the High Speed Rail Authority, I cannot support a measure that constrains my flexibility in making appointments."

Poochigian said that since the board's inception in 1996, only three members have been from the Valley -- and none of them served simultaneously.

"With the bond scheduled to appear on the ballot in 2004, there could be very serious transportation and development implications for this region," Poochigian said. "Hopefully, this bill has sent a clear message that the San Joaquin Valley is severely underrepresented on this governing board and that residents here are now paying attention."

Fresno Bee editorial, October 3, 2002:

Just the beginning

New Bay Area smog rules will help here, but much more must be done.

As cars and trucks ride the roads, they spew emissions into the air for all of us to breathe. To help reduce these toxins and create healthier air in California, the Legislature in 1994 enacted Smog Check II, which sets tough emissions standards and holds motorists responsible for cleaning up high-polluting vehicles.

For years, Smog Check II has applied to every metropolitan region in California -- except one. The Bay Area, which benefits from wind patterns that blow pollutants out of the Bay Area and into the Valley, has been held to a lower standard.

At last, state legislators have scrapped that double standard, and Bay Area motorists soon will comply with the same emissions standards that govern California's other urban areas.

The legislation, signed Friday by Gov. Davis, is a boon to the health of Valley residents and a credit to the bill's sponsor, Assemblyman Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, who threaded it through the legislative process. But the measure, welcome as it is, is no cure-all for pollution in the Valley, where residents breathe some of the filthiest air in the country. Of the pollution in the Valley, no more than about 25% wafts in from the Bay Area -- and often less. That number will dwindle as Smog Check II takes root there.

Which brings us to another useful dimension of extending Smog Check II to the Bay Area: Valley leaders can no longer duck the issue by blaming our filthy air on outsiders. As it is, the Valley creates 75% or more of its own air pollution, and the region faces harsh federal sanctions in 2005 if our leaders do not act to clean it up.

Local elected leaders have a responsibility to help cleanse the grimy air that chokes the Valley and degrades the health of their constituents. As the clock ticks toward strict federal penalties -- and as allergies, asthma and illness proliferate -- there is no time left for passing the buck and shunning tough policy choices.

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, October 3, 2002

'The right balance'

By Dennis Manning
Clovis

This letter was also signed by 14 other COG board members.

The Measure C extension, the continuation of the 1/2-cent sales tax, is properly balanced to achieve maximum air quality gains. Some argue that it doesn't allocate enough to transit and therefore it will not do enough for air quality. They have it backwards.

We need transit improvements, and the Measure C extension allocates about 17% for transit plus being eligible for more in the flexible funds portion, but **overspending on transit will boost air pollution**. Why? Because if we fail to provide adequate road capacity for our growing population (about 200,000 more in 25 years) congestion will rise dramatically. More congestion means more pollution. More congestion will also degrade the transit service, the very system we want to work well.

The right balance must be struck between transit and roads. The extension does exactly that. The balance was arrived at by a year-long process in which a wide array of public interests was represented.

Not passing the Measure C extension will be devastating for transit users and road users. It deserves everyone's support.