

## **Forest thinning underway to thwart wildfires**

Porterville Recorder, Friday, July 23, 2010

SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST — The Ponderosa Project is underway in the community of Ponderosa, with the Forest Service beginning to thin vegetation to prevent wildfires.

Smoke will be visible in the area from prescribed fires set to begin this fall to burn away the piles of tree branches, twigs, moss and tall brush that are being cleared from the area.

Spokeswoman Denise Alonzo Forest said Forest Service personnel will work closely with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to manage smoke production and minimize any local impacts. When the prescribed burning begins, residents should keep the windows closed in their cabins. Seasonal homeowners can contact the Springville Office, 539-2607, prior to vacationing in Ponderosa to check the status of burning if concerned about smoke in the area.

“Protecting communities is high priority work in the Monument as well as in all national forests,” Priscilla Summers, Western Divide District Ranger, said in a statement. “Reducing fuel in areas around communities, residences, and administrative sites are a first priority for actions to reduce the risk of large wildland fires.”

At elevation 7,200 feet, Ponderosa is located in the mountains east of Porterville on the Western Divide Ranger District in the Giant Sequoia National Monument.

The Forest Service is using a variety of techniques, including chainsaws, hand tools, and mechanical equipment to chip or burn the vegetation that fuels wildfires. A stewardship contractor is expected to finish working in the area by the end of this week.

“The fuel reduction and hundred-foot clearance conducted on private lands is also important to reduce the risk of fire. I am pleased with the cooperation of the local communities,” Summers said. “Please use caution and watch for workers and trucks while traveling through this area.”

The prescribed burns will occur on approximately 1,100 acres. Alonzo said that when completed, the piles themselves may not be entirely consumed in the fire.

“Typically there are remnants of the pile left to protect the soil from erosion, and promote growth of new vegetation. Some piles will be left unburned to benefit wildlife,” she said. “The results will look similar to treated areas in the Camp Nelson Urban Interface Project area a couple of years ago.”

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Saturday, July 24, 2010:](#)

### **Sludge power? Smells like a winner**

Good news: Kern County might have found a solution to its imported sewage-sludge problem.

Liberty Compost and Recycling Inc. operates a composting facility about 10 miles northwest of Lost Hills. The company plans a \$200 million retrofit project, installing equipment to produce electricity by burning the unpleasant waste shipped from Southern California. County planning commissioners will take up the matter Oct 28.

Ultimately, the plant would produce enough power to supply up to 20,000 households while consuming a substance everyone wants to get rid of.

The sludge, also called biosolids, is the byproduct of sewage treatment. The material continues to be trucked from the Los Angeles area to Kern, where it is disposed of by spreading it on land.

Kern voters have attempted to halt the practice with an initiative known as Measure E, but the matter is still tied up in a legal knot.

No matter which way the case goes, a renewable-energy project that deals with a pair of problems at once -- energy supply and environmental waste -- seems like a great idea.

But not everyone is so sure. Tom Frantz, an environmental activist in Shafter, opposes the project over concerns that heavy metals in the sludge could be released into the air.

We have a few questions, too. How much water will the plant use, and where will it come from? Will there be any residue after the sludge is burned, and what will be done with it? Is there any way to mitigate air pollution from the trucking operation? Will the project require taxpayer money?

According to initial reports, the project will create about 24 jobs, some of which require technical skill. That's not enough positions to make us plan a ticker-tape parade, but it's a start. Kern is blessed with an abundance of energy resources -- oil, gas and plenty of sunshine -- and if the Liberty enterprise is successful, it could help establish our region as a major draw for renewable-energy projects, potentially creating thousands of jobs.

What do you think? Get a draft environmental impact report at the Kern County Planning Commission's website, [www.co.kern.ca.us/planning](http://www.co.kern.ca.us/planning), and then let your voice be heard.

The commission is accepting public comments until Aug. 7.

[Letter to the San Diego Union-Tribune, Saturday, July 24, 2010:](#)

### **California Air Resources Board responds**

The July 17th Union-Tribune editorial ("Air board still scandalous") repeats discredited claims that the health science related to fine particles emitted from diesel-fueled engines and other sources is too uncertain to support the California Air Resources Board's tough emissions limits.

To the contrary: Last month, the U.S Environmental Protection Agency issued a report approved by the federal Clean Air Act Scientific Advisory Committee concluding that there is a causal relationship between exposure to these fine particles (known as PM2.5) and premature death, and includes estimates of premature deaths linked to PM2.5 in cities throughout the country, including Los Angeles and Fresno. The report also provides a new factor for estimating premature deaths associated with PM2.5 that the ARB will rely on going forward.

The U.S. EPA and its Clean Air Act Scientific Advisory Committee considered evidence from multiple peer-reviewed studies, including studies pointing to plausible biological mechanisms for cardiovascular deaths associated with PM2.5. A 2009 peer-reviewed American Cancer Society study, which followed nearly half a million people in 116 cities, found premature death linked to PM2.5 – including in Los Angeles. While the relative proportion of PM2.5 constituents can vary, California cities have a mix of pollutants quite similar to that found in other cities.

Diesel defenders cite a handful of California-specific studies that failed to find PM2.5 particles as a health hazard in California but ignore the weight of evidence from multiple studies. While the ARB-commissioned study referenced in the editorial did not produce results identical to the American Cancer Society study, preliminary findings show a correlation between death from heart disease and exposure to PM2.5. Other California studies are consistent with the national studies. These issues were expressly discussed and debated in a public symposium conducted by CARB in February of this year.

Peer-reviewed studies have always been the source of health findings cited in CARB reports. It's time to recognize that CARB has a legal obligation to reduce PM 2.5 emissions to meet federal air quality standards by the 2014 deadline, and that the science and the health basis for that mandate is as strong as ever.

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