

## **Air quality grants will benefit Merced cyclists, pedestrians**

By Thaddeus Miller

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, Sep. 5, 2014

Merced's miles of bicycle paths and lanes will increase after the city this week accepted a large part of more than \$2 million in grants for citywide air quality projects.

Merced City Council voted 6-0 Tuesday for the funding that will pay for bike shelters and a bike path along Black Rascal Creek, as well as the work to fill out sidewalks and synchronize some stoplights in town. Councilman Michael Belluomini was absent.

Mayor Stan Thurston praised the efforts of city staff to add the improvements through grant dollars. "I think we ought to be very proud," he said.

The city adopted the 2013 Bicycle Transportation Plan about a year ago. It has plans for more than 100 projects that will make it easier to travel around the city pedaling a bike.

Since 2004, the city has completed nearly 30 bike-related projects.

The bike path that will run along Black Rascal Creek between Yosemite Avenue and McKee Road will be the Class I type, which means it is not shared by cars. The upgrade will complete the path, which stretches from near Highway 59 to the Lake Road trail, which leads to UC Merced, City Manager John Bramble said. "(That's) a definite plus for bicycle riders in our community," he said.

The three bike shelters, which serve as a place to lock bikes and escape rain, are planned for M Street and N Street. The city will ask for bids from contractors in the coming months.

Plans to synchronize lights along G Street and 16th Street, as well as complete sidewalks on Carol Avenue and several near R Street, are also meant to improve air quality by reducing the greenhouse gases that come from cars sitting at stoplights.

Sidewalks are seen as a way to encourage walking. Carol Avenue connects to Motel Drive and is a common place for those on foot, according to city staff. The sidewalks near R Street were a request from UC Merced students living in the area.

Tatiana Vizcaino-Stewart, the manager of the local Building Healthy Communities, said the bike paths in particular are a benefit to the community because they improve routes youngsters use to get to school. They also serve folks needing to cross town safely for work or other reasons.

Bike-related upgrades in the city in the past year include the "sharrows," or the marking indicating shared lanes, along Main Street.

New lanes were striped between Childs Avenue and 21st Street.

The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality cash, which couples with local matching funds is funneled through the Merced County Association of Governments.

The city is counting on improved transportation projects, such as the bike plan, to account for about 22 percent of the forecast reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions, according to the city's 2012 Climate Action Plan.

The bike plan adopted last year lays out several improvements around Merced College and UC Merced, as well as upgrades in south Merced, downtown and near Golden Valley High.

Along with air quality, increasing bike lanes and paths promotes fitness in Merced.

## **Yosemite wildfire leads to helicopter evacuations**

The Associated Press

The Fresno Bee, Monday, Sep. 8, 2014

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, Calif. -- A wildfire burning for weeks in the backcountry of Yosemite National Park grew unexpectedly, forcing the helicopter evacuation of about 100 park visitors.

Park spokeswoman Kari Cobb said some of the evacuees Sunday included hikers who had climbed the park's iconic Half Dome peak, rising nearly 5,000 feet above Yosemite Valley. Others had to be airlifted from campgrounds and hiking trails in the area.

Roads into the park remained open, but several trails were closed.

Firefighters had monitored and controlled the lightning-sparked fire that started several weeks ago between Little Yosemite Valley and Half Dome, Cobb said. But the flames were fueled by strong winds and high temperatures Sunday.

"We just got unbelievable crazy winds and unexpected hot conditions," Tim Ludington, the park's chief of roads and trails, told the Fresno Bee. "The fire behavior totally changed."

The fire burned at least 700 acres, with no containment established. Cobb said firefighters were hampered by the rugged, inaccessible terrain.

About 15 miles southwest of the park, firefighters were slowly gaining the upper hand on a wildfire near the town of Mariposa.

The 300-acre blaze was 70 percent contained, and an evacuation order already has been lifted for the 300 homes most threatened by the fire, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said. A portion of Highway 49, a main entrance into the park, was briefly closed.

The fire broke out Friday afternoon and threatened a total of 700 homes and five businesses.

Steep terrain in the area and the dry conditions brought on by California's drought initially hampered firefighters, one of whom received a minor injury Friday, officials said.

Meanwhile, in far Northern California, firefighters increased their control over a blaze that broke out nearly a month ago and despite it growing to 151 square miles. U.S. Forest Service officials said Sunday that no structures have been damaged, and the fire was 30 percent contained.

The Siskiyou County Sheriff's Department on Saturday night issued an evacuation advisory for an undetermined number of residents in a neighborhood newly threatened by the fire. The residents weren't required to leave but advised to prepare to evacuate.

Forest Service officials estimate that \$54.7 million has been spent and nearly 2,700 people used to fight the fire.

## **Mariposa County's 300-acre Bridge fire 65% contained**

By Nadia Pearl

The Fresno Bee, Saturday, Sep. 6, 2014

The Bridge fire in Mariposa County was 65% contained on Saturday evening.

The fire has burned 300 acres and has threatened 700 homes and five businesses, authorities said.

The blaze broke out about 12:40 p.m. Friday near the William Sell Bridge over the Chowchilla River Canyon, about a 15-minute drive northwest of Oakhurst.

The majority of the evacuations in the community of Ponderosa Basin were lifted at 7 p.m. Saturday. For residents living along the dirt section of Harris Road between Ponderosa Court and Highway 49, evacuations are still in place.

All roads leading into the community are closed and authorities said closures and continued security patrols are expected for the next few days.

There were 746 fire personnel working to extinguish the blaze Saturday. One firefighter received a minor injury on Friday and was treated and is now home, officials said.

The fire is moving southeast toward the Sierra National Forest, said Cal Fire spokeswoman Karen Guillemin-Kanawyer. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

A second blaze that broke out Friday night near Oakhurst was quickly subdued. It was 4 acres and 50% contained Saturday -- firefighters continue to put out any smoldering spots, Guillemin-Kanawyer said. Guillemin-Kanawyer said 95 out of 100 fires are caused by people -- which means they can be prevented. She shared some tips: When driving, make sure towing chains aren't hanging, which can ignite a spark while dragging along the pavement, and don't make a campfire close to dry vegetation.