

## **Citation for burn in forest protested**

### **Conservation groups blast air district move to discipline parks**

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee  
[Fresno Bee, Friday, Sept. 10, 2004](#)

Three conservation groups have written protests over a citation issued last month to Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks for lighting a brush-clearing forest fire in defiance of local air authorities.

Stepping into a rift between the parks and air authorities, the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club and the Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign said the citation -- with a possible fine up to \$75,000 -- chills efforts to make the forest safe.

"The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is functioning more as part of the problem than part of the solution," wrote Wilderness Society representative Jay Watson, who called the district a "rogue agency."

Air district officials replied that their primary mission is protecting 3.5 million people in the Valley.

"We consider the health of the Valley," said executive director David Crow.

The district will review the citation and notify parks officials of any possible fine in the next few months. The case could wind up in Superior Court if the two sides do not agree on the fine.

The incident highlights sometimes conflicting goals of protecting mountain communities and millions of forest acres vs. maintaining public health in one of the country's most fouled air basins.

The situation puts pressure on land managers -- the Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service and others. They encounter only a certain number of days with the right weather conditions to allow burning of brush, snags and small trees. They prefer not to lose opportunities.

Why do they need to burn in the forest? People doused too many forest fires over the last century, robbing the Sierra of a major natural tool to control growth. Now, thick forests are primed to feed destructive wildfires, such as the 150,000-acre McNally fire two years ago. But all fires, even the small, brush-clearing burns, create smoke and gases that can make ozone or smog in the Valley. One fire last year sent out 125 tons of ozone-making gases each day.

The air district's goal: Don't let those gases or the smoke create a violation of the federal air standards in the Valley. The district does not take chances with the public's health, officials said.

"There is always uncertainty with meteorology," said district supervising meteorologist Evan Shipp. "We can all agree on concepts about what's taking place with weather. But we don't always agree about what fire is going to do."

The differing goals have sparked disagreements many times, said officials at Sequoia-Kings Canyon, two adjoining national parks east of Fresno.

The disagreements came to a head June 30, when parks Superintendent Richard Martin decided to ignite the burn in the face of a district ban. In a letter to the air district, parks representatives said the burn ban was explained only by statements about "gunky air in the Valley."

"We feel frustrated by the very vague things they say when we ask for the scientific reasons why we can't burn," said parks fire information officer Jody Lyle. "We aren't keeping pace with the backlog of burning."

Air officials said their reasons for the no-burn order were more specific, but they did not reveal them. They said the matter will remain confidential until after the citation is settled.

But parks officials said their observations and meteorology reports from other sources, such as federal fire forecasters, made them believe the burn would not cause a problem. It did not.

June 30 was the third of five burning days to clear 257 acres in Giant Forest. Parks officials that day refused the district's no-burn order, saying it would cost thousands of dollars for crews and equipment to stop in the middle of the five-day job and wait.

They also wanted to finish the job so firefighters could be available to handle Fourth of July weekend fires. Crews set the 17-acre fire.

The parks last month received the citation not for creating pollution, but for defying the no-burn order. The citation and potential fine are short-sighted, said Warren Alford, representing the Forest Protection Campaign.

"Fire is as much a part of the mountains as water," he said. "We're only burning about 1% of what has historically burned each year. The larger picture is what's missing from the air district's assessment."

Crow, of the air district, said his staff has been very supportive.

"We always try to accommodate these burns because we know they're pulling together equipment and people," he said. "But we are always looking at the impacts on the Valley."

## **No air alert today**

[Modesto Beek, Friday, Sept. 10, 2004](#)

Air quality officials looked at the forecast and decided there was no need for a Spare the Air day today in the Northern San Joaquin Valley. Higher temperatures earlier this week brought on a Spare the Air alert on Thursday in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties. The alert continues today in Fresno and Kings counties, and today and Saturday in Tulare County and the San Joaquin Valley portion of Kern County.

## **Only 15% participate in Spare the Air day**

Michael S. Cabanatuan, staff writer

[S.F. Chronicle, Friday, September 10, 2004](#)

A survey by air quality officials Thursday found that 70 percent of Bay Area residents polled were aware of Tuesday's Spare the Air day, and 15 percent -- at best -- took some actions to avoid polluting the air.

BART officials reported that their morning free rides Tuesday and Wednesday -- both Spare the Air days - boosted ridership by 5 percent the first day and 8 percent the second day.

With so many people apparently aware of Spare the Air Day, but comparatively few participating, it begs the question: Is this program working?

Absolutely, according to regional air quality and transportation officials. As long as the Bay Area keeps from violating state and federal pollution standards, they say, it's a success.

The Spare the Air goal is to reduce air-polluting emissions -- everything from motor vehicles and barbecues to fumes from paint and hair spray -- on days when the Bay Area is in danger of exceeding state and federal air quality standards.

Exceeding the federal standards not only endangers the health of those forced to breathe the dirty air, it threatens the region with the loss of federal highway funds.

"The goal of Spare the Air is to have no violations," said Lucia Libretti, spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "We can't control the weather, but we can control emissions. So, we ask people, when we have these (hot, windless) conditions, to change their behavior -- temporarily."

BART, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the air district announced the free-ride plan in June. The offer will be good through Oct. 15 on up to five Spare the Air days that occur on weekdays. It's the Bay Area's first attempt at a regional incentive program to use mass transit to reduce air pollution.

Randy Rentschler, spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which funded BART's free-ride program, said that approach made more sense than, for instance, trying to drive more people to make a permanent shift from driving to mass transit.

"It's a more effective, more believable, more realistic strategy," he said.

Conditions Wednesday had meteorologists at the air district convinced that the Bay Area would exceed federal standards somewhere in the region, said Libretti. But no violations occurred.

Does Spare the Air day deserve the credit?

"We'd like to say that," said Libretti. "But it's very hard to calculate."

BART officials estimate that the free-ride program prevented 352,000 pounds of pollutants from being dumped into the air Tuesday and 528,000 on Wednesday. They calculated that estimating the number of free rides -- 16,000 on Tuesday, 24,000 on Wednesday -- based on afternoon ridership, counts of morning riders by monitors at some stations and comparisons with historic ridership patterns.

Those numbers were multiplied by 22 pounds, the estimate of the number of pounds of pollutants a vehicle puts into the air daily.

## **Honda will add new SUV**

From the Associated Press

[Friday, Sept. 10, Modesto Bee, Cars](#)

DETROIT - Honda Motor Co. will expand its lineup of sport utility vehicles with a new model from the Acura luxury division, even as the Japanese automaker says its focus is on fuel economy and it considers [other hybrid models](#).

Takeo Fukui, Honda's president and chief executive, told members of the Detroit Economic Club on Tuesday the company will begin making the new Acura SUV in Ohio in 2006, but he declined to say whether it would be built at Honda's plant in Marysville or the one in East Liberty.

Company officials said the new vehicle will be smaller and cost less than Acura's MDX SUV.

Honda spokesman Ed Miller said production of the vehicle is not expected to result in more jobs at Honda. But he said it will help provide job security as market demand changes.

"In today's competitive business, it's become mandatory to be able to produce multiple numbers of vehicles on the same assembly line," Miller said.

Honda, which marks 25 years of U.S. manufacturing this month, already makes the Accord, Civic, Element and Acura TL models at its Ohio plants. The company, Japan's second-largest automaker, also builds vehicles in Alabama.

Meeting with journalists after his presentation, Fukui said [Honda's focus](#) was on using its highly flexible plants and fuel-efficient engines to produce vehicles like the new Acura SUV and an upcoming sport-utility pickup.

Among the top six automakers in the United States, Honda is the only one without a pickup.

The company has said the sport-utility truck "combines the utility of an open cargo bed with the interior space and functionality of an SUV." Honda is expected to show a production version of the SUT in the spring.

## **We can help kids breathe easier**

**As study highlights smog's impact on young lungs, we can't ignore call to combat pollution's causes**

[Merced Sun-Star, Editorial, Friday, Sept. 10, 2004](#)

Just because we can't see it doesn't mean it's not there.

We're talking about air pollution.

Even though we've only had five Spare the Air days so far this summer -- compared with 27 by this time last year -- Merced County residents have no right to be complacent.

A study published this week in the New England Journal of Medicine brought home an alarming fact: Our children's lungs are being seriously impacted by the bad air. Not only can this lead to all sorts of respiratory problems, such as aggravating asthma, but it can also lead to premature death.

But let's face it, we're not hearing anything we didn't already know.

The study was conducted by researchers at the University of Southern California, who monitored the lungs of more than 1,700 schoolchildren in 12 Southern California communities from fourth grade until they graduated from high school.

Children breathing dirty air were nearly five times more likely than children in less polluted communities to grow up with weak lungs. In fact, the damage was similar to that found in the airways of kids whose parents regularly smoked around them.

While the study didn't actually include Merced County, it doesn't mean we should ignore the results -- or the call to action.

Twice a year, we in the Central Valley are urged to do our part in helping to clean up the air. In the summer, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District asks everyone to reduce or avoid activities that cause air pollution, such as driving, when the air quality is especially bad. In the winter, new mandatory regulations aim to cut down on the amount of particulate matter in the air by banning wood burning when pollution levels are high.

Nearly 60 percent of the Central Valley's air pollution is caused by motor vehicles. Do your part by offering to organize a carpool at your place of business, taking care of all your errands in one trip, and walking or biking to get where you're going.

While we'd like to lay the blame for our smog on drivers in the Bay Area, the reality is that only about 10 percent of our pollution comes from there. Areas more to the north get hit by nearly three times as much bad stuff.

As our county grows, so will the number of cars, as well as activities that contribute to poor air quality. The effort to synchronize our stoplights is one way the city can combat pollution caused by Merced's commuters.

That's all well and good, but there's more we can do. For example, stop using aerosols such as deodorants, hair spray, air fresheners and cleaning products, which contain smog-forming chemicals. These seemingly innocuous parts of our daily routine have been pegged as contributing to more than 20 tons of air pollution each day in the Valley.

Companies, too, can get involved in cleaning up the air by reusing or recycling materials, and by creating environmentally friendly versions; improving methods used to reduce waste, spills and leaks; and educating their employees to help prevent pollution.

While it seems that this smog-producing heat will never end, there are only three more weeks until the end of the summer's Spare the Air season in the Central Valley. But it doesn't end there: Within a matter of months, the wintertime wood-burning restrictions will be ready to go into force.

Clean air -- and our children's lungs -- shouldn't be dismissed out of hand. This latest study should bolster our collective resolve to ensure the healthy future of tomorrow's adults.

## **Kids Face Danger in the Air**

[LA Times, Editorial, Friday, Sept. 10, 2004](#)

Everyone knows smog makes breathing harder. But the findings by USC researchers published Thursday in the *New England Journal of Medicine* showed it can also impair children's lungs for life. Air pollution — specifically, particulates — doesn't just make ailments worse, it can create them. A child who grows up in Upland, for example, stands a nearly 10% chance of growing up with weak lungs, making him or her prone to respiratory problems, cardiopulmonary disease and even premature death.

Particulates — microscopic particles in the air typically caused by diesel exhaust, dust and fumes from animal waste — have only recently received serious regulatory attention.

The new findings should have politicians jumping into action. A good place to start would be for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign AB 2042, the port pollution bill. The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach

account for nearly a quarter of the particulate pollution in the region, and there are plans to expand them. The modest legislation of Assemblyman Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach) would cap port pollution at 2004 levels.

The Bush administration, in probably its strongest environmental initiative so far, announced new regulations this year requiring cleaner fuel and cleaner engines for off-road diesel vehicles such as construction equipment. Diesel emissions are the major source of particulate pollution in the L.A. area, and the new regulations will make a real difference.

But the administration has seriously undercut some of California's efforts to control smog. When Southland air regulators tried to force private vehicle fleets to replace worn-out diesel engines with cleaner-burning ones, the administration sided with engine makers and oil companies in court, killing the regulations. The administration also rejected any move to require environmental reviews before allowing Mexican diesel trucks, which tend to be older and dirtier, to travel on U.S. roads. And the Environmental Protection Agency has made it easier for coal plants — a major source of particulates — to avoid installing new pollution equipment when they renovate.

Credit California policymakers for moving forward anyway. The California Air Resources Board this summer passed a regulation limiting the time diesel trucks can idle. Schwarzenegger helped put together a deal to raise money to help companies switch to cleaner-burning engines, and he is expected to sign the enabling legislation. Another bill on his desk, AB 1009 by Assemblywoman Fran Pavley (D-Agoura Hills), would require Mexican trucks entering California to meet smog standards. It too deserves the governor's signature.

If Washington doesn't want to help, at least it might do California kids the favor of staying out of the state's way.

## **Keep out dairy stink**

[Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 9, 2004](#)

I hope we can count on *The Californian* to keep after the county supervisors to end this idea of increasing the dairy stink by allowing more large dairies in the populated areas of the county.

They seem to ignore all legitimate evidence from down south about dairy stink and pollution. Being politicians they do not want to admit that someone else has better ideas as presented in hearings conducted by Sen. Dean Florez.

Please keep everyone posted and give the supervisors no choice but to stop the dairy expansions in Kern County. Most citizens are unable to attend the meetings and hearings but do not want the mess that exists in Southern California from dairy pollution.

-- ROBERT CAMPBELL, Bakersfield