

Dairy regulations discussed during public hearing

By SARAH RUBY, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Jan. 7, 2005

WASCO -- State Sen. Dean Florez wants to know if his dairy laws are working.

It's been three years since the Legislature passed Florez's bill, SB 700, that brought dairies under the rule-making eye of air regulators.

Florez, D-Shafter, held a hearing on the topic Friday afternoon, inviting dairymen, air and water quality officials and residents to hear what's been accomplished.

The law isn't yet responsible for cuts in dairy pollution, nor do dairymen know which specific technologies to buy to satisfy air rules due this summer. But we're getting there, said air and water regulators.

Next month the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will release a draft of a rule aimed at cutting smog-forming volatile organic compounds from dairy operations. The rule must be in place by July 1, when the district will also suggest technologies to help dairymen control pollution.

"I think we're making substantial progress," Florez said.

He wanted a guarantee from regulators that dairies willing to pay for pollution-cutting technology today won't be penalized when the final rule comes out this summer, he said. Some dairymen are ready to cover up manure lagoons or change the way they handle cow feed, but they're wary of investing prematurely.

The air district will work with those dairymen, said Dave Warner, director of permit services for the air district.

"I can certainly understand the hesitancy," Warner said at the hearing. "(But) if you step up early you're not going to be wasting your money."

It's what dairymen wanted to hear. Dairies are ready to build here in the Central Valley, they told Florez, but they're afraid to spend money without knowing the rules.

"We don't want to waste our dollars and not achieve what we're wanting to do," said Nathan de Boom of the Milk Producers Council.

The data on dairy pollution is limited, and while air regulators are pushing to meet SB 700 deadlines, scientists are still figuring out how much pollution dairies produce. The district's current estimate -- that each dairy cow produces 19.3 pounds of volatile organic compounds each year -- is likely to change as scientists release the results of ongoing studies.

Volatile organic compounds aren't the only environmental concern when it comes to dairies, according to speakers at the hearing. Airborne ammonia can react to form fine particles, and there is danger of overloading groundwater supplies with salt.

- 2003 - SB 700 went into effect, subjecting California dairies to air quality rules for the first time.
- Summer 2005 - The district announced that individual dairy cows produce 19.3 pounds of smog-forming chemicals each year.
- Summer 2006 - The district must pass a rule to control dairy emissions.
- Early 2007 - Dairies must submit plans for cutting pollution.
- 2008 - Those plans must be put into action.

Commission to consider mini-mart

Tulare Advance-Register
Staff reports

Jan 7, 2006

A new mini-market complete with fuel and an automatic carwash could be on the way if Tulare Planning Commissioners approve a request Monday.

Commissioners will consider a request by Gurdeep Singh to build a mini-market on Prosperity Avenue, between Hwy. 99 and Cherry Court.

If approved, the market would sell alcohol and food, in addition to the fuel. The market is proposed to be open 24 hours a day, according to a report.

But a letter from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District stated the mini-market would, "contribute to the overall decline in air quality."

In other business, the commission will consider requests to:

- Expand Chilitos, 727 E. Prosperity Ave., to allow for additional seating and handicap improvements to the restaurants' existing restrooms. Seating at the restaurant is expected to increase from 56 to 116.
- Consider a request by Town & Country Park Home Owners Association to relocate their on-site swimming pool.
- What: Tulare Planning Commission meeting
- When: 7 p.m. Monday
- Where: Council chambers in the Civic Affairs Building, 125 South M St.
- Public comment: 7 p.m.

Dairy plan faces threat of lawsuit

Group wants an environmental study of project near Riverdale.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee
Monday, January 9, 2006

An environmental watchdog group is threatening court action unless the state performs an in-depth environmental study on a 3,200-cow dairy being built west of Riverdale in Fresno County.

The Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment has asked the state Regional Water Quality Control Board for an environmental impact report, or EIR, on the dairy.

The group plans to file suit if the process does not start by Feb. 1.

"There's no public avenue for people to find out about a big, new dairy until it's built," said lawyer Laurel Firestone of the environmental group.

The dairy owner, Charles Van Der Kooi, already is working with the regional water board and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for environmental approvals.

An EIR would be more expensive and include more topics, such as growth issues, cumulative impacts and economic or social effects. The environmental group has given the regional board a deadline of Sunday to respond to its letter.

The possible legal action highlights the absence of a Fresno County screening process for the booming dairy industry. Unlike most San Joaquin Valley counties, Fresno County does not lead the investigation of new dairies.

Regional water board officials confirmed they received the environmentalists' letter, but they declined to comment further.

A Fresno County Farm Bureau official who is also a dairy owner said he considered an EIR unnecessary.

"We have to go before the water board and the air district already," said Steve Nash, whose family has owned a dairy in the Selma area for 75 years. "Once you've done that, I'm not certain you need anything else."

Environmentalists said a fuller investigation will allow the public a chance to talk about all concerns, including possible nuisances such as flies, mosquitoes, noise and odors. They said a 1,000-cow dairy generates as much waste as a city of 20,000.

"For years, this issue has been neglected in this county," Firestone said. "How can you justify ignoring the state's environmental law?"

The Valley has 2.6 million animals on dairies, and hundreds of thousands more are on the way in the next few years. Many dairy owners are moving from the Chino area in Southern California into the Valley.

The migration is not affecting Fresno County the same as other counties, said dairyman Nash. New dairies are locating in the wide-open spaces on the county's west side.

"With land going out of production on the west side, it's good for the economy for dairies to locate out there," Nash said. "I don't think you have to regulate property when you're not harming anyone."

Fresno County stretches over 5,963 square miles — the largest county in the Valley. The area has about 185,000 dairy animals, the second-lowest total among Valley counties.

Yet the area's dairy animal population has grown by 21% over the last three years, the third-fastest expansion in the Valley. Another 50,000 animals will be added in the coming years, according to regional water board figures.

Van Der Kooi, who is moving his operation from Chino, defended his move to the rural countryside between Riverdale and Five Points. He said there are no houses or schools where he is building.

"It's pretty much row crops," he said. "It's a good place for a dairy, and the dairy will help out this county with jobs and economic benefits."

Environmentalists disagreed, saying people still need to know what is going on, especially in an industry that is expanding so quickly.

Firestone said animal waste poses a danger to the air and underground water supply. Contamination could pose health threats to people, including diarrhealike bacterial infections.

Firestone's letter added that ammonia and hydrogen sulfide in the air from dairies can irritate the eyes, ears and throat. Together with concerns over water quality, methane, reactive organic gases, particle air pollution, insects and odors, an EIR is warranted for Van Der Kooi's new dairy, she said.

Firestone added: "The regional board has never done an EIR on dairies in Fresno County. It is time to start."

News briefs from Southern California

In the San Francisco Chronicle

By The Associated Press

Friday, January 6, 2006

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (AP) - Nighttime controlled burns in dangerously overgrown portions of the San Bernardino National Forest could be approved soon by air quality officials who have previously rejected the plan because of pollution concerns.

The U.S. Forest Service has been pushing for South Coast Air Quality Management District permission to conduct nighttime burns, forest fuels officer Bob Sommer said.

"Burns at night are currently not something allowed in AQMD regulations," district spokesman Sam Atwood said. "We understand the risks of wildfires, and we're taking a close look at what we can do to offer some flexibility to the Forest Service."

A decision was expected sometime this month. A variance could be sought to get around regulations or the agency's executive officer could make an emergency declaration, Atwood said.

Two years ago, the Old and Grand Prix fires destroyed about 1,000 homes in communities within and adjacent to the forest. A massive tree-removal campaign was undertaken to avoid a repeat of the devastation but there are still millions of dead trees.

Controlled fires allow removal of dead trees and brush when moisture levels are high and temperatures are low. Burning is less expensive than thinning the forest mechanically with crews and chain saws.

Burning at night is preferred because larger, hotter fires can be kept under control better than hotter, drier daytime hours, Sommer said.

Governor wants \$222.6B for growth

Proposal includes plans for improving Highway 99

Modesto Bee News Service and staff reports

Saturday, Jan. 7, 2006

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Schwarzenegger's \$222.6 billion Strategic Growth Plan to improve the state's infrastructure paves the way for an easier commute on Highway 99.

The proposal, which includes \$107 billion to improve the state's roads and air quality, calls for the widening of the busy state thoroughfare in Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties.

It also asks for millions to modify or reconstruct interchanges along the well-traveled corridor, including the often gridlocked off-ramps at Pelandale and Standiford avenues.

"Our systems are at the breaking point now," Schwarzenegger said. "But we cannot be overwhelmed by this reality. We cannot freeze in the face of this future. We cannot bury our head in the sand and say, 'If we don't build it, they won't come.'"

Among the highlights proposed:

In Stanislaus County, modifying interchanges on Lander, Standiford and Pelandale avenues and reconstructing interchanges on Highway 132, Hammett, Mitchell-Service roads, Whitmore and Kiernan avenues, and West Main and Pine streets.

Improvements to Highway 99 in Stanislaus County would cost \$1.15 billion, in San Joaquin County \$712 million and in Merced County \$672 million.

Throughout the state, there would be 1,300 miles of new highway lanes, including 550 miles of carpool lanes.

The governor's office issued a report outlining proposed expenditures and ways to pay them off, including general obligation bonds, toll lanes and existing funds.

The bond package could be paid back largely without raising taxes, said Mike Genest, the state's finance director. That could be accomplished by redirecting payments the state is making on the \$15 billion budget-deficit bonds voters approved in 2004, which will be paid off in 2010, he said.

Genest said the payments would be the same because the infrastructure bonds would be repaid over a longer period of time.

Although spending on public works generally is popular, Schwarzenegger will have to cover a lot of ground before the plan goes before voters.

He's hoping Californians will approve the first installment of \$25.2 billion in bonds as soon as possible.

On Friday, he asked lawmakers to scrap a \$9.95 billion high-speed rail bond measure already on the November ballot to clear the way for his massive plan.

Genest called the high-speed rail "a visionary idea (that's) kind of far in the future."

Meanwhile, weeks, if not months, of negotiations with Democratic and Republican lawmakers lie ahead to iron out the ultimate size of the strategic plan bond issue and what it will pay for.

Schwarzenegger initially said he wanted to place bond measures before voters on the June primary ballot, but spokesman Rob Stutzman said Friday the governor's goals could be accomplished even if the measures were put off until the general election in November.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez expressed doubt Friday that lawmakers could hammer out an agreement in time to place the bonds on the June ballot.

"The first thing we have to avoid is the danger of going to the voters with proposals that haven't been thoroughly vetted," he said. "With issues that are this important, it is much more important to draft them well than to draft them quickly."

Wood smoke education backed, not 'fireplace cops'

Sacramento council agrees to wait for state action on fires, will opt for outreach

By Terri Hardy -- Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Friday, Jan. 6, 2006

Sacramento City Council members balked Thursday at regulating wood-burning fireplaces and agreed to wait for state environmental regulators to continue studying the issue.

"We're not going to have fireplace cops driving up and down the streets looking for smoke," said Councilman Robbie Waters.

The council's law and legislation subcommittee instead directed city staff members to work with the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District to educate the public about health problems associated with fireplace smoke.

Councilman Kevin McCarty, who brought the issue to the subcommittee, testified that the particulate matter from wood-burning fireplaces is dangerous.

McCarty said U.S. Environmental Protection Agency research found wood smoke is 12 times more likely to cause cancer than tobacco smoke, and breathing the microscopic particles can be especially harmful to the elderly and young children.

"I had no idea of the dangers," McCarty said. "This stuff is harmful to our health."

Representatives from the air quality board and the American Lung Association said research is building on the pollution and health problems. They said the state and federal governments probably would step in with fireplace regulations in coming years.

Councilman Steve Cohn, a member of the subcommittee, said the city should work on public outreach and look into regulating wood-burning fireplaces in new homes.

"Clearly this is an important issue that we need to get a lot more serious about in this county," Cohn said.

But others on the committee, Councilwoman Sandy Sheedy and Waters, said an ordinance curtailing fireplace use was premature.

Any proposed ordinance would go to the full City Council for final approval. Some San Joaquin Valley communities already have such bans, with first-time violators issued \$50 tickets.

All four members of the committee supported a public outreach campaign with the air quality board. The public would be asked to curb fireplace use when particulate levels are high - usually on foggy winter days.

Also, people would be educated about the health effects of wood smoke and cautioned about burning wrapping paper in a fireplace.

The committee also endorsed a plan by the air quality board to start a rebate program to replace non-EPA certified wood-burning inserts and other devices with low-polluting fireplace units.

[Commentary, Bill McEwen in the Fresno bee, Jan. 5, 2006](#)

Valley is on a path to better days ahead

I might feel differently in a week or the next time a politician panhandles for headlines with something as silly as Jim Costa's request that the national parks sell only American-made souvenirs.

But right now I'm optimistic about 2006 and don't care if the T-shirts at Yosemite are made in a sweat shop in China or a sweat shop in Los Angeles.

This feeling-good-about-Fresno thing is scary because by nature it's hard for me to be optimistic without feeling terminal.

In other words: if the sky is falling and we're going to be buried alive by foreign-made souvenirs, I want to be the first — not the last — to know.

The reason for the oomph in my step: Good people and good ideas are putting our region on a path to better days.

We're seeing fewer of the tiresome, dead-end conservative vs. liberal battles. People have stopped settling for excuses and started making things better. You want examples, of course.

The best is the effort to improve San Joaquin Valley air quality. For years, many people — including politicians who should've known better — said air pollution wasn't a problem.

Then came a second stage: we've got pollution, but we can't afford to do anything about it. Now we're cleaning the skies and last month the local air district unanimously adopted a first-in-the-nation development fee to mitigate urban sprawl. Who would've thought?

Smart folks long have preached the advantages of regional cooperation to Valley politicians, only to see them march to individual or party drumbeats.

But federal and state lawmakers put aside early disagreements and united last year behind Fresno Mayor Alan Autry's plan to overhaul crumbling Highway 99 by seeking interstate status.

Local congressmen also have united in the hope of producing a long-term regional water plan. If Democrats and Republicans can sip from the same glass, is it asking too much for farmers and environmentalists to agree on a plan to restore the San Joaquin River instead of having a judge decide?

How many times have you heard that downtown is rebounding? Too many, I'm sure. But there are parts of downtown — I swear — with a big-city feel.

Park your car and walk from the old water tower to Selland Arena. Zig and zag. Check out the federal courthouse and other additions to Fresno's skyline. You won't believe it, but the city actually built a pretty parking garage. It's next to Saroyan Theatre.

The University of California, Merced, is changing the Valley for the better. The school not only is a powerful economic engine, but it will reduce Valley brain drain and expose thousands of young people to the charms of our region.

My favorite Fresno Unified School District tidbit last year was that the district paid \$270,000 to service the medical-benefit accounts of dead retirees. Michael Hanson is superintendent now. He talks like a guy who knows how to stretch resources and doesn't accept excuses.

If he figures out head lice and raises test scores, I won't have Fresno Unified to kick around anymore.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Monday, Jan. 9, 2006](#)

State of the state proposals show real leadership

Californians might have felt the winds of "Hurricane Arnold" on Thursday night. In an election-year State of the State address, Gov. Schwarzenegger proposed the kind of expenditures that could rebuild a state after a terrible storm — or after years of neglect and crushing debt.

No doubt, the promise of spending \$222 billion for massive improvements in transportation, education, levee repairs, flood control and more was meant to impress potential voters. That's to be expected in an election year. But this is precisely the kind of bold thinking that appealed to voters when they elected Schwarzenegger. That he offers to incorporate the priorities of leading Democrats is the kind of leadership voters suggested they wanted in November, when they dismissed Schwarzenegger's initiatives in the special election.

Schwarzenegger proposes handing out goodies to every area of the state — including the Central Valley, which has frequently been neglected. Included are specific plans to spend \$6 billion to improve the backbone of the valley — Highway 99. The governor would upgrade it to "interstate status" from Bakersfield through Stockton, enhancing the flow of traffic on a highway nearly choked with trucks and commuters.

On his wish list is \$1.1 billion for highway improvements in Stanislaus County, including the interchanges at Lander Avenue, Highway 132, Whitmore Avenue, Mitchell Road, Standiford Avenue, Pelendale Avenue and Hammett Road — among others. There's \$672 million for Merced County and \$712 million for San Joaquin.

There is also an emphasis on improving the San Joaquin and Sacramento deltas, which provide drinking water to 23 million people, and money for new and improved schools and funds [to clean our air](#). As we said, there's a lot to appeal to a lot of people.

Schwarzenegger is proposing a 10-year program, and each of five stages would require voter approval of general obligation bonds. That money would be combined with federal and local money to fund the \$222 billion in improvements. There will be time to adjust the proposals and establish priorities as this grand plan moves through the Legislature.

Our representatives would be remiss if they did not fully investigate any plan that purports to build, build, build without raising taxes. But we don't see the smoke and mirrors that were present in budgets of previous administrations. This is a long-term investment in infrastructure, the kind citizens expect from their state.

Californians didn't elect Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2004 because he looks good behind a desk or has a knack with numbers. They voted for him because he projected the image of a bold, courageous leader. He's always been a larger-than-life figure, and these are larger-than-usual proposals worthy of that image. That's why we like them — even if not all his dreams come true.

Our leaders don't have to deliver on all their promises, but they do have to lead. In this case, Schwarzenegger is doing so.

[Editorial in the LA Times: The Saturday Page / Arnold's World; Jan. 7, 2006](#)

The road to gridlock

GOV. ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER'S plan to spend \$222 billion over a decade to pay for much-needed infrastructure improvements is a visionary idea. But when it comes to the transit portion of the governor's plan, he apparently envisions a future of gridlock and cloying air pollution.

Schwarzenegger proposes \$107 billion for transportation, which includes projects to clean up the ports and speed the movement of cargo as well as things such as new bike paths. More than \$80 billion would go to improve state highways and other routes, with less than \$5 billion for transit and rail services. And all of the latter total would go for trains between cities, such as Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner. Not one thin dime goes for mass transit within cities.

That means Los Angeles can forget about an extension of the Red Line subway down Wilshire Boulevard. The desperately needed Green Line light-rail connection to LAX? Not going to

happen, at least not within a couple of decades. More busways? Only if the county can fund them itself.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority is struggling to find the money to meet its current commitments, such as construction of the Expo Line from downtown to Culver City. Local transit planners had been relying on the governor to include money in his bond proposal to help fund some of L.A.'s other critical needs. Sadly, they were ignored.

State transportation officials feel that local governments should handle such urban mass-transit projects. That's nonsense. For any sizable transit project, the state usually kicks in a quarter of the cost, the locals take care of another quarter and the federal government covers the rest. The proposed bonds would put the state so deeply in debt that cities such as Los Angeles would get a pittance from the state to cover new projects well into the future.

There's plenty more reason to question the governor's ideas on transportation. He envisions toll roads and lanes on certain key routes — not a bad concept in principle, but again, the devil is in the details. One project discussed by state planners is a dedicated toll lane for trucks on the 710 Freeway to carry goods from the ports of L.A. and Long Beach to downtown-area rail yards. This does little or nothing to reduce diesel emissions. A better way to reduce pollution and truck traffic is to build more on-dock or near-dock rail yards and send cargo by rail along the underused Alameda Corridor; Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway has proposed building just such a yard.

Fortunately, the governor's spending priorities are not set in stone. His proposal will now go to the Legislature, which has only a short time to draft a bill if a ballot measure is to be ready in time for the June elections. The Legislature should shift money from road improvements and into urban mass transit instead. L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a former Assembly speaker who also chairs the MTA board, should make it a priority to ensure that happens.

Big-city transit takes cars off the roads — relieving congestion on the very routes the governor aims to improve — and reduces vehicle emissions. Though the governor's freeway projects are worthy, expanded freeways quickly become jammed as they lure more drivers. Building more roads and freeways while starving mass transit is a vision from California's past, not for its future.

ANALYSIS

Governor's plan omits housing and transit

Critics say crucial needs unmet under ambitious bond proposal

Greg Lucas, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, January 7, 2006

Sacramento -- For all its size and sweep, critics say Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's ambitious 10-year public works construction plan leaves out or glosses over several key needs in California, specifically affordable housing and a bigger investment in mass transit.

Schwarzenegger devoted the vast majority of his speech to a \$222 billion spending plan that would use existing revenue and \$68 billion in new bonds to finance a panoply of modernization, rehabilitation and construction projects for California's universities, public schools, highways, levees, jails and courts.

But some environmentalists, transit agencies and affordable housing advocates questioned a number of the governor's spending priorities and omissions.

The governor has said his proposal is a starting point for negotiations with lawmakers.

Democratic leaders of both the state Senate and the Assembly each have their own public works plans, which embrace some different spending choices than Schwarzenegger's -- in particular creation of affordable housing.

California is home to the top 20 least affordable housing markets in the country, according to a study sponsored by the state's Building Industry Association.

Yet Schwarzenegger's massive public works financing proposal contains no money to help generate more affordable housing.

"It's extremely disappointing to hear the governor lay out a 10-year strategy of this magnitude and leave one of the central areas of infrastructure off the list entirely," said Christine Minnehan, a lobbyist for the Western Center on Law and Poverty who also led the campaign for Proposition 46, a \$2.1 billion homelessness and housing bond approved by voters in 2002. Funds from the bond are nearly exhausted.

"The state is the only entity that has provided housing for the lowest-income people," Minnehan said.

Mike Genest, director of Schwarzenegger's Department of Finance, said the administration weighed including housing but capital improvements to education and transportation were the highest spending priorities. A cap the Republican governor wants to impose on debt payments prevented housing from making the cut, Genest said.

H.D. Palmer, a spokesman for the Department of Finance, stressed that the fact that housing bonds were not included in the governor's proposal does not mean other parts of the administration aren't working to make homes more affordable.

Nearly half of the governor's proposed spending -- \$107 billion -- is consumed by transportation projects. Of that, \$88 billion is targeted for highway and road improvements. Rail transit would receive \$4.5 billion over the 10-year life of the proposal.

The first transportation bond the governor proposes for the June ballot spends half of its \$6 billion on highway projects, \$2 billion on port improvements and \$400 million for intercity rail expansion.

"It completely ignores funding for transit, in my opinion," said Tony Rice a lobbyist for the California Transit Association. "Why build freeways so someone can live 75 miles from work. Why not make it easier to live near where you work?"

Rice cited a study commissioned by the state Senate three years ago that found a \$100 million unfunded need for transportation projects, of which one-third was transit.

The governor also wants to remove from the November ballot a \$9.95 billion bond to provide seed money for a high-speed rail system linking Northern and Southern California.

The Schwarzenegger administration said the bond proposal maintains the same level of funding that transit receives now.

Several environmentalists also questioned how the governor's transportation proposal, weighted as it is toward highway projects, helps reach his reduction targets announced in December for emissions that deplete the ozone layer.

"The governor made a critical campaign pledge to cut the state's air pollution in half, and he's committed to an aggressive plan to tackle global warming. How does this new proposal get us on a path to achieving those goals?" said Ann Notthoff, legislative director of the Natural Resources Defense Council in California.

The GOP governor also did not mention in his plan any strategies to discourage additional sprawl, another troubling omission for environmentalists.

"The state shouldn't throw big money at infrastructure projects without efficient land-use policies," said Bill Allayaud, a lobbyist for the Sierra Club in Sacramento.

Doctors and other health care providers and advocates were perplexed by Schwarzenegger's failure to mention California's burdened emergency rooms and high number of uninsured citizens.

"I was surprised. Health is an area of growing concern for the public," said Dr. Jack Lewin, chief executive officer of the California Medical Association.

"In a state with 7 million uninsured people and 3 million noncitizens who lack health coverage, the problem of the uninsured and under-insured is a significant challenge, and we must face it," Lewin said.

Margita Thompson, Schwarzenegger's press secretary, said the administration would be discussing health care next week when the governor unveils his proposed budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Sunday, January 8, 2006:](#)

Environmentalists finally get down to very serious business

Rather than pressure the federal government and affix blame, activists seek cooperative solutions with local and corporate leaders

by Peter Asmus

I've always considered myself an environmentalist, railing against the big corporations that always seem to put their own profits over social progress. These days, however, guidance on solutions to pressing problems such as global climate change are coming from some of the very same companies we once loved to hate.

Rather than trying to institute change through the federal government, activists are shaking hands with chief executives who now see the light when it comes to preserving our precious, yet fragile world for future generations.

Don't get me wrong: many oil companies and other corporations are still villains.

Yet some, such as British Petroleum, have doubled their already substantial investments in renewable energy, while our elected officials in Washington introduced legislation making it more difficult to build new wind farms. Products such as Toyota's gas-electric hybrid Prius exceed what our federal government mandates in fuel efficiency. This has the potential to transform the auto market into a better eco-actor much faster than our wimpy federal government can.

Financial markets, once viewed as anathema to ecological values, are now recognizing the risks of global climate change when evaluating the stock value of a company.

A Harris poll conducted in October shows that 75 percent of U.S. adults agree that "environmental standards cannot be too high and continuing improvements must be made regardless of cost." Yet, after more than 30 years of government intervention, the quality of air most Americans breathe is still considered unhealthy. The water in nearly half of our rivers, lakes and streams is unfit to drink, swim in or fish in.

Legions of self-described "environmentalists" seem powerless to stop assaults on our natural heritage. No doubt part of the blame rests with environmentalists. We have often presented ourselves in ways that became offensive to blue-collar workers, minorities and the elderly. Possessed by a religious zeal equal to rabid free-market ideologues or evangelical Christians, environmental activists focused on stopping bad things. Typically, we did not get into the nitty-gritty of how to implement solutions. Instead, we left those details to government. We often demonized the companies that created pollution, not recognizing that our economy was an interrelated system that needed fixing in order to encourage more intelligent behavior by everybody.

Writers Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus proclaimed the environmental movement dead in 2004. They pointed to the fact that since 1970's Earth Day and the passage of a series of new environmental laws during the Nixon administration, environmentalists had evolved into just another special interest group.

There is some validity to this claim. Like others vying for political capital in Washington, most environmental groups tend to frame issues in ways that do not recognize how efforts to save the environment need to be connected to efforts to reduce poverty, lift up the developing world, and transform the economy into something that values, instead of threatens, our long-term survival.

Yet critics of environmentalism also fail to see that a few pioneers are showing how environmental concerns fit into the bigger picture.

Take, for example, Randy Hayes, a Mill Valley resident who once headed the San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network. Like Greenpeace, the Rainforest Action Network engaged in public demonstrations and developed successful consumer boycotts against Burger King, Mitsubishi Motors and other companies. These boycotts resulted in agreements that changed corporate behavior for the better.

"It is funny. Back in the late 1980s, I declared to the world that I was resigning from the environmental movement," Hayes told me. "Instead of the environment, the cause was now sustainability."

Sustainability is the new buzzword of the 21st century. It encompasses both economic and social dimensions in the problem-solving process. If we really want to save the planet, we have to create a system that supports all other living creatures, along with the legions of human beings that will be filling up the globe.

Once the debate moved from environmentalism to sustainability, growing numbers of corporate executives began to join in the conversation.

Yet sustainability is a vague word. DuPont, a company with an environmentally negative image, now proclaims that "sustainable growth" is its core mission. The company is now dedicated to getting down to zero injuries, illnesses, incidents, wastes and emissions, yet it is busy developing genetically modified products opposed by many who consider themselves green.

Having lived with the Hopi Indian tribe in Arizona for about a decade, Hayes has a big-picture "systems theory" view of the world that guides his thinking about corporations. He argues that our markets need to recognize the bona fide but currently unrecognized costs associated with pollution or sweatshop labor. "Without recognition of these real and external costs in the market, we will still have the 'cheater capitalists.' What we need to do is ecologize capitalism. When you do that, the cleanest suddenly becomes the cheapest and most profitable."

Hayes' Rainforest Action Network settlements with Mitsubishi Motors and Mitsubishi Electronics helped spur other companies, including Home Depot, to offer consumers wood products that do not destroy rain forests. Just before the holidays, Rainforest Action Network applauded Goldman Sachs for being the first global investment bank to adopt a comprehensive environmental policy that acknowledges the value of "ecosystem services." What this concept recognizes is how much more valuable a living forest or ocean is than a destroyed habitat.

Goldman Sachs has pledged to present to lawmakers public policies on biodiversity conservation and global climate change. As an owner of fossil-fuel power plants, the firm has agreed to reduce emissions contributing to global climate change. Goldman Sachs -- like Citigroup, Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase -- has also instituted prohibitions against financing industrial activity in ecological "no-go" zones that could harm indigenous peoples.

Another hopeful trend is a shift toward solutions that spring from the local level instead of being dictated from higher up.

Living in Sacramento in the '80s -- when the fate of the Rancho Seco nuclear power plant hung in the balance -- opened my eyes to the power of people at the grassroots level. This was, after all, the only nuclear reactor to be shut down by a local ballot initiative. The local municipal utility with the unfortunate acronym of SMUD (Sacramento Municipal Utility District) then went on to lead the nation in efficiency and solar and wind power.

Again, Hayes serves as a good example of this shift to the local. "I came to realize," he said, "that I had spent 20 years on the international front trying to save rain forests and that the international conventions were not getting the job done. Our nation-state is ungovernable. And this is why I began exploring opportunities at the county and city levels of government, first with the city of San Francisco and now with the city of Oakland. I believe it is at the city and county level that the flexibility and the public governance are strong enough to make changes."

Still, Hayes has found it frustrating trying to push sustainability in a city where crime, poverty and other issues crowd the agenda. Hayes now splits his time between trying to institute change at

the local level and finding antidotes to globalization as executive director of the International Forum on Globalization, headquartered in San Francisco's Presidio.

Today, the most exciting environmental developments are happening at large corporations and local governments. Like Hayes, my work has increasingly migrated to these realms, too. I push for solar energy and other renewable energy sources in Marin County, while engaging in conversations with idealistic entrepreneurs and corporate executives concerned about the world their children will live in.

Right now, Wall Street, large multinationals (such as Intel, General Electric, the Gap and Sharp Electronics) and Bay Area local governments are leaders in integrating environmental concerns into the bigger economic picture.

If we are going to win this war to save the world from global climate change, as well as from terrorism and poverty, then we environmentalists need to stop pretending that it is all about us.

We need to look to nature for solutions and then lead by example. We need to talk to labor unions, chief executives and struggling farmers from the developing world.

Is the environmental movement dead? No, it is just in the process of transforming itself into something larger than the next frightening direct-mail fundraiser or the next plea to write letters to members of Congress.

Perhaps 2006 will go down in history as the year that our strong concern for the environment translates into individual, government and corporate actions that reflect a new sense of responsibility and connection to our still wild and wonderful world.

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[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Monday, Jan. 9, 2005:](#)

More yellow stickers seen in car-pool lanes

Opening high-mileage hybrid cars to car-pool lanes is becoming increasingly popular in California.

Three months after the state opened the diamond lanes to solo drivers in certain hybrid cars, more than 39,000 owners have applied for gaudy yellow stickers that signify they can travel in carpool lanes any time regardless of whether they have passengers.

Department of Motor Vehicles officials told the *Sacramento Bee* that more than 39,000 hybrid car owners have taken advantage of the law that went into effect three months ago. In addition, applications are coming in at a rate of about 200 a day.

Purpose of the law is to encourage drivers to purchase hybrids in an attempt to cut back oil imports and pollution.

The law also mandates a cutoff of 75,000 hybrids allowed in the carpool lanes. When the hybrid-carpool applications reach 50,000, the state Department of Transportation will assess whether the diamond lanes are getting too crowded.

If they haven't, the law allows another 25,000 hybrid car owners to sign up.

Under the law, the special privilege applies only to vehicles that get at least 45 miles to the gallon and also meet stringent state emissions standards.

At this time, state officials told the *Bee* that only two Hondas and one Toyota meet those standards.

Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura, author of the law, said she hopes it encourages more Californians to purchase environmentally friendly vehicles.