

Wildfire spares Kern air

Little increase in particulate levels detected, agency spokeswoman says

BY JASON KOTOWSKI, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, August 14, 2007

While smoke from Santa Barbara County's Zaca fire wafts into Kern County, perhaps remarkably, air officials say our air quality hasn't suffered much from the massive blaze.

There has been a small increase in particulate levels from the fire, said Brenda Turner, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The fire had burned about 96,606 acres as of Monday, according to a news release by the Los Padres National Forest and Santa Barbara County Fire Department.

"We fortunately are not seeing a tremendous effect on air quality," Turner said.

So far, the areas that have been most impacted are in southern Taft and Maricopa, Turner said. There was a report of ash in Taft over the weekend.

A smoky smell could indicate air quality is growing more hazardous, Turner said. Residents who smell smoke or see ash should try to stay inside.

But even with smoke from the fire, air quality this summer has been much better than last year, Turner said.

With fire containment at only 44 percent Monday and weather pattern changes, the Santa Barbara County Fire Department, along with other agencies, issued a "red flag alert" for all of Santa Barbara County. It was based on a shift toward warmer temperatures with low relative humidity, according to a department news release. Fire officials are asking residents to be aware of activity in their area and report suspicious behavior or concerns to 911.

Sparked by lightning on July 4, the fire calmed down in mid-July, but then picked up again, according to NASA, which on Sunday caught an image of the fire's smoke using a Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer on its Terra satellite.

Fire activity was extreme Sunday because of low humidity and high temperatures, according to a U.S. Forest Service news release. The fire made significant runs within the indirect fire lines in the Sisquoc, Santa Barbara, Pine and Judell canyons and Salmon Peak areas.

As of Aug. 7, more than 25 Kern County firefighters were helping to fight the blaze.

Happy Canyon and Figueroa Mountain roads are closed at the Los Padres National Forest boundary, East Camino Cielo is closed between Painted Cave and Gibraltar roads because of fire equipment traffic and Paradise Road is open to residents only, the news release said. The Los Padres National Forest expanded closure is in effect.

For more information on closures, go to www.fs.fed.us/r5/lospadres.

Smoke from Santa Barbara County fire hangs over Visalia

Staff and wire reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, August 14, 2007

Smoke from a six-week-old Santa Barbara County wildfire that got new life from high temperatures covered the western half of Tulare County Monday.

The fire, surging across 13 square miles of arid brush in the Dick Smith Wilderness and Los Padres National Forest, was caught by winds that swept in from the Pacific Ocean. The winds carried huge plumes over Kern and Tulare counties.

A spokesman at the Hanford office of the National Weather Service said the smoke was in the upper atmosphere and probably does not pose an air-pollution hazard.

"The fire in Santa Barbara is contributing some smoke to the area, but our monitors aren't showing any negative health impact," said Janelle Schneider, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Another blaze, called the Tar Fire, burning nine miles southwest of Avenal in Fresno County, was not contributing to smoke in Tulare County, weather bureau officials said. It is burning in an area of naturally occurring asbestos, according to CAL FIRE.

The agency said it had implemented an asbestos-area emergency management plan to remove firefighters from the area for decontamination. The fire was burning along Avenal Creek, west of Highway 41, and had consumed more than 5,000 acres since it started Friday.

The Santa Barbara County fire, ignited from welding sparks July 4, was reinvigorated by triple-digit temperatures and low humidity. Firefighting efforts were expected to be hampered by hot weather through the week, said county fire Capt. Eli Iskow.

"It's a stubborn fire because of the fuel built up and the dry conditions," said Iskow. "It's a fire that you can't just go and put out, but have to fight on its own terms."

The fire has consumed about 95,000 acres.

The blaze was 44 percent contained Monday, down from 68 percent the previous day, Iskow said. The fire's anticipated full-containment date is Sept. 7.

Fire officials could light a backfire along the blaze's growing northeast flank to remove fuel from its path, fire spokesman Joe Pasinato said. Similar controlled burns kept the fire from intruding deeply into a sparsely populated area south of the main burn area, Pasinato said.

The evacuation order in those areas - which include the Paradise Road community and Los Prietos Boys Camp - was downgraded Sunday night to an evacuation warning, officials said.

More than 3,000 firefighters, 21 helicopters and eight air tankers were battling the blaze. Cost so far? \$66.7 million.

Wildfire has reached area of asbestos

By Natalie Ragus

Hanford Sentinel, Monday, August 13, 2007

A fire in rural Kings County southwest of Avenal, which began burning over the weekend has now reached an area of asbestos, Calfire officials said today.

Due to the toxic nature of asbestos, Calfire officials are doing what they can to keep firefighters safe, said Calfire spokesman David Brooks.

"It has been decided that, due to the inherent risk of asbestos material, firefighters that do not have the proper respiratory protection will be moved out of that area and their equipment be decontaminated," he said.

Firefighters without adequate respiratory gear will continue to fight the fire, but will be assigned to other sections of the fire a good distance away from the asbestos.

The blaze first broke out just after 5:30 p.m. Friday about 9 miles southwest of Avenal.

More than 1,000 personnel from around the state are fighting the fire, has burned 5,120 acres, and is 30 percent contained.

So far, no homes are threatened, but two firefighters were injured, said Brooks.

One broke a wrist, while the other suffered from heat exhaustion. Both are expected to make complete recoveries.

The primary concern now, said Brooks, is keeping the fire away from a power grid in the area which provides power throughout the San Joaquin Valley,

Thus, firefighters have taken a proactive approach, and begun clearing the brush surrounding the grid, said Brooks.

Officials said they hope to keep the fire from spreading north of Monterey County or east of the San Joaquin Canyon.

Last winter, fire officials began bracing for what they termed a "difficult" upcoming fire season.

Dry weather, and an intense heat wave back to back has led several wild fires to spark throughout the state.

Most recently, in June, firefighters spent weeks putting out a blaze, which burned more than 3,000 acres in the Lake Tahoe area.

Co-generation plant still not operating

By Dennsi Wyatt, Managing Editor
Manteca Bulletin, Tuesday, August 14, 2007

It sounded like a good plan at the time.

The City of Manteca was investing \$350,000 in a co-generation plant at the wastewater treatment plant.

It would reduce air pollution by using methane gas - identified as one of the valley's worst pollutants - by using it to power a turbine to produce electricity instead.

That electricity would help power the wastewater treatment plant and reduce the municipal PG&E bill by \$450,000 a year.

That was more than five years ago.

Today, the cog-gen plant is still sitting at the wastewater treatment plant unused. Methane gas is still being burned off into the atmosphere.

What went wrong was changing air pollution control rules. The co-gen plant was OK by San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District staff based on regulations on the books when it was ordered. But by the time it arrived finished from Germany and ready to install, the rules had changed.

The district had decided to change diesel standards. Diesel is used to help power the co-gen plant. The district held fast even when the city tried to point out the reduction in methane gas significantly offset diesel concerns when it came to air pollution. The district, however, doesn't trade off one form of air pollution for another.

The district is expected within a few months to OK the co-gen plant after minor modifications are made costing up to \$33,800.

But there's another hitch.

Viron - the firm that recommended the co-gen plant along with other energy savings the city implemented that has been saving the city an average of \$592,965 a year in power savings - is out of the picture. The cost of retrofitting the co-gen plant to the new standards was deducted from Viron's last check.

A new firm, Johnson Controls, is assessing other available co-gen plants on the market and believes it is possible to get significantly more savings with a newer unit.

"We will still save energy and money when we are able to get on line with the retrofit," said Assistant City Manager Karen McLaughlin. "The savings, though, won't be nearly as great. Johnson Controls said there may be better technology out there that will save even more on our energy costs."

McLaughlin concedes there is nothing stopping the air quality district from changing rules again in mid-stream.

She also noted the Viron contact was far from being effective. In fact, even with the unused co-gen plant being a \$350,000 plus expense, the city is still saving \$592,965 a year in electrical costs thanks to a performance-based energy service contract inked in 2001 with Viron.

Even without the co-generation plant in operation, Manteca's realized annual savings are 21.6 percent higher than the "guaranteed" savings in Viron's original contract of \$487,741.

Changes the city made under the direction of the consulting firm was installing variable speed pumps on seven municipal wells to save \$90,096 a year in power costs.

Among other improvements was switching to LED lights for traffic signals saving \$32,115 a year, other changes at the wastewater treatment plant saving another \$82,000 a year, bundling some of the city's various PG&E accounts saving \$3,359 annually, and lighting retrofits in offices saving another \$15,025 annually.

Viron noted the big \$200,000 savings from the street light acquisition was based on the fact utility-owned rates are higher than customer-owned rates for street lights. The savings are after electricity, maintenance, and capital outlay recovery are factored into the equation.

At the same time, service complaints from residents about street lights dropped drastically. Instead of waiting months for street lights to be repaired, they are now done in less than a week after they are reported.

Manteca contracts with a private company to do the work.

PG&E also contracted with a private company to repair street lights but the service level was not as good.

Daily flight north to attract plenty

BY DREW PHILP, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, August 14, 2007

The new daily ExpressJet Airlines flight from Meadows Field to Sacramento is expected to attract 10 to 20 business travelers a day, Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce research shows.

That spurred the company to add the flight on jets with memory foam seats, XM Radio headphones at each of its 50 seats -- and \$1 beer.

It's been at least 10 years since Meadows Field has offered a flight to Sacramento, according to county airport director Jack Gotcher.

The airline expects to have full or nearly full flights every day. The flight will take about an hour, and continue to Spokane, Wash.

"There is more response to this than anything we've seen in the market," Gotcher said during a celebration of the new flight on Monday. "On a scale of one to 10, this is about a 12."

The flight will leave at 7 a.m. and return about 7:30 p.m., offering business travelers an entire day in Sacramento and a flight home at night. Service starts Sept. 9.

This decision will potentially save taxpayers money. Previously, local government officials sometimes chartered jets to get to the capital. A charter can cost about \$450 each way, Gotcher said. Now travelers can get to Sacramento for about \$59 one way.

Debbie Moreno, president and CEO of the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce, said she didn't know if the flight will save dollars, but it will relieve some of the traffic on roads, and slightly [improve air quality](#). She said the flights will save businesses money on meal and lodging expenses because people can go to Sacramento and return to Kern in a day.

She also noted that Sacramento is close to popular ski resorts and Salt Lake City.

"This is not only a good business decision," she said, "this is a good pleasure decision also."

Flying to Sacramento

Where: Meadows Field Airport in Bakersfield to Sacramento International Airport.

When: Leaves Bakersfield at 7 a.m. Departs Sacramento at 6:35 p.m. Flights start Sept. 9.

Price: Advance purchase is \$59 for a one-way ticket until Sept. 30. Prices for after Sept. 30 are unavailable. The walk-up price is \$139.40. Tickets may be purchased at xjet.com

L.A. court paves way for sludge

Popular Measure E on hold for now; Kern may appeal ruling

BY GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, August 14, 2007

Kern's voter-approved sludge ban stumbled in a Los Angeles federal courtroom Monday when a judge overturned a year-old ballot measure meant to stop imports of Southern California's treated sewage sludge to local farmland.

The final ruling by U.S. District Court Judge Gary Allen Feess, for now, invalidates Kern's Measure E, which local voters overwhelmingly passed in June 2006. The measure stops use of treated sewage sludge as fertilizer on unincorporated land in Kern.

Feess' 55-page ruling found Kern had legitimate environmental concerns about sludge spreading. But Measure E failed scrutiny under the so-called "commerce clause" of the federal Constitution, his ruling says, because it did not apply to the whole county and therefore discriminated against Los Angeles. (Kern's incorporated cities, which are not subject to county rules, are not bound by Measure E.)

The ruling also agreed with sewage generators' assertions that sludge spreading falls under state solid waste policies meant to promote recycling.

The latest decision in Kern's decade-old legal battle isn't the end of the line, however.

"It's dead only if we give up," said Bernard Barmann, Kern County's top lawyer.

County supervisors will decide later this month whether to appeal Feess' ruling to the federal 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, Barmann said. The board will likely discuss the matter in closed session at its Aug. 28 meeting, the first date Barmann can put it on the agenda.

"It's too important an issue to let (the ruling) stand," Barmann said.

Outside lawyers helping with Kern's side, including a San Francisco firm hired by the Kern County Water Agency, will confer on what to do next, he said.

A decision by the appeals court could take two years or so to come down.

In the meantime, Barmann said, the Measure E sludge ban is on hold.

Supervisors could ask the appeals court for an injunction to halt sludge imports while the case is being decided, he said.

Monday's ruling didn't surprise sludge opponents, who said Feess' earlier rulings indicated he would side with the agencies on his turf.

"This is a judge who probably wears an L.A. Dodgers cap six days out of the week," said state Sen. Dean Florez, the Shafter Democrat who spearheaded Measure E.

"This is not the right venue for us, period," Florez said.

REACTION

Los Angeles officials, meanwhile, touted the ruling in a news release issued by the city shortly after 5 p.m.

"An adverse ruling would have dramatically increased the costs of managing biosolids and increased pollution in our environment," Cynthia M. Ruiz, president of the city's Board of Public Works, said in the release.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said in the release he hoped the decision "will permit us to work together to address the best interests" of Kern and Los Angeles residents.

The city of Los Angeles trucks about 99 percent of its treated human and industrial sewage to a 4,700-acre site south of Bakersfield. Crops grown on the so-called Green Acres farm are mostly sold to local dairymen.

Sludge from Orange County, Los Angeles County and other areas is also trucked into Kern. Hundreds of thousands of tons of imported sludge are disposed of on local farmland each year.

Supporters of the practice call the mudlike end product "biosolids" and claim it is an environmentally friendly way to recycle waste.

Opponents, however, say sludge threatens soil and groundwater. Tens of thousands of industrial chemicals along with pharmaceutical in the domestic supply are concentrated in goo that is applied over and over again to the same patches of farmland.

LONG TIME COMING

Land application was promoted by the federal Environmental Protection Agency in the early 1990s after ocean dumping was outlawed in 1987. The city of Los Angeles' sludge, for one, had created an underwater desert seven miles from shore.

For a time, cities were stuck hauling sewage sludge to landfills. Disposal costs rose dramatically. After land application was standardized in 1993 it turned out to be far cheaper.

In 1994, locals started complaining to supervisors about smells and messes as imported sludge showed up on about 24,000 acres across Kern.

Ever since, Kern has been battling with Los Angeles and other Southland agencies over the sludge, first by imposing stricter treatment standards and more recently with the push for an all-out ban.

In 2004, the Kern County Water Agency pushed to get sludge-spreading operations moved to western Kern, away from valuable underground water banks.

The bid failed but ended up kick-starting what was to become last year's Measure E.

In the meantime, Kern has become a key player in the sludge debate nationwide as other locales fight to stem an ever-growing influx of urban sludge.

A ruling in a separate suit two years ago by a state appeals court in Fresno, for example, was an important legal decision strengthening local control over land use.

"So many other rural areas all over the country don't have the money to afford this kind of fight," said Caroline Snyder, professor emeritus at New York's Rochester Institute of Technology and founder of Citizens for Sludge-Free Land.

It's a worthwhile fight, Snyder said, that will help other municipalities "in every state" faced with similar problems.

Rotary meets developer with skepticism

Patterson Irrigator, Monday, August 13, 2007

The developer who wants to build a 7.5-square-mile industrial center in Crows Landing met with resistance from the Patterson Rotary Club Wednesday as he described preliminary plans for the West Side's most ambitious project.

PCCP West Park developer Gerry Kamilos told the crowd of about 80 people that his project would generate 37,000 jobs and that it would not include housing. He said the project, at the Crows Landing Air Facility, would increase train traffic in Patterson by six roundtrips a day.

"This project is about jobs," Kamilos said. "It's not about housing."

The presentation kicks off a public outreach push of 11 workshops throughout the county over the next two weeks. Patterson will host three workshops - more than any other city in the county.

Folks at Wednesday's meeting peppered Kamilos with questions and comments, and several people expressed distrust of the Sacramento-based developer.

"You're seen as an outsider," Harold Hill of Patterson told Kamilos.

"When you're all done, you're going to go back home to Sacramento," Patterson-area resident Kenny Buehner said. "You won't have to deal with it."

None of the attendees spoke in favor of the project.

Kamilos and his company have proposed building a business park at the county-owned airbase about 4.5 miles southeast of Patterson. In February, the county board of supervisors chose West Park as the likely developer of the project.

West Park has until April to lay out detailed plans for the facility. Then, the board will vote on whether to accept those plans.

So far, West Park has proposed a 4,800-acre complex that would develop thousands of acres of farmland surrounding the base. The northern tip of the project would be about a mile from Patterson's southern border.

A key component to the facility would be a rail connection to the Port of Oakland that West Park hopes to pay for with state bond money. The development team also hopes to attract agricultural processors, distribution centers, police and fire services, workforce-training firms, health care-related employers, manufacturers and aviation-related businesses.

In all, a West Park brochure estimates the facility would employ about 37,000 people at build-out in 2021. The six trains that would make round trips daily from the base to the Port of Oakland would create an additional 24 minutes of train traffic a day in Patterson, Kamilos said.

Truck and train traffic were some of the attendees' main worries.

"Truck traffic is going to intensify right here because of your project," Buehner said, adding the trucks would lower the West Side's [air quality](#).

Specifics on how much more truck traffic the facility would create were not available, though eventually they will be, Kamilos said.

Much of the information Kamilos shared with Rotarians has been included in an invitation West Park sent to thousands of households across the county this week. The mass-mailed invitation is part of the effort to inform people about next week's workshops.

In addition to Patterson, West Park officials will visit Crows Landing, Grayson, Newman, Ceres, Modesto, Turlock, Riverbank and Oakdale. The Grayson meeting will be conducted in Spanish.

West Park has capped each meeting at 40 people, so those interested in attending must RSVP. The intent was to make sure attendees wouldn't feel intimidated when speaking to the group, Kamilos said.

If there is enough demand, he said, more workshops will be scheduled.

The county board of supervisors mandated that West Park conduct workshops before its second update to the board Aug. 28.

If the workshops are like the Rotary meeting, Kamilos and West Park will have a lot of convincing to do.

"You're looking for the best place to make your project work," Buehner said, "not necessarily the best project for this community."

U.S. Will Fund Plan to Charge Tolls In New York

Associated Press

Washington Post, Contra Costa Times, August 14, 2007

Transportation Secretary Mary Peters is scheduled to announce today that the federal government will fund New York's pilot plan to reduce traffic by charging tolls to drivers entering the busiest part of Manhattan, congressional aides said last night.

The congestion-pricing system proposed by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg (I) would be the first of its kind in the nation. London and Singapore have similar toll programs.

The dollar value of the federal aid for New York was still unclear, but officials hoped for as much as \$537 million from Washington.

The Transportation Department has been considering which five out of nine cities will receive a major infusion of cash for local traffic reduction plans, and agency officials notified congressional staffs last night that New York had qualified for the Urban Partner program, which paves the way for grant money, according to aides who spoke on the condition of anonymity ahead of the announcement.

The grant would settle a long-standing squabble among New York officials about Bloomberg's plan, which would charge cars \$8 and trucks \$21 to enter Manhattan south of 86th Street on weekdays between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.

It aims to ease the crunch of worsening rush hour traffic and improve the city's air quality by reducing emissions. Opponents argue that tolls amount to a tax on New York workers who live outside Manhattan and will not affect driver behavior enough to improve air quality or overall traffic patterns.

The other cities competing for federal aid are Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Miami, Minneapolis, San Diego, San Francisco and Seattle.

CMU researchers get federal grant to study air quality

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, August 14, 2007

PITTSBURGH—Two Carnegie Mellon University researchers have been tapped by the federal government to study how climate change and international pollution affect air quality in the United States.

Peter Adams, a civil and environmental engineering professor, and Spyros Pandis, a chemical engineering research professor, got \$900,000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to do the work, the university announced Monday.

The researchers will build on earlier work that used computer models to simulate global climate and atmospheric chemistry.

The researchers will track neurotoxins, such as atmospheric mercury, and attempt to see the effects that cars, trucks and coal-burning power plants have on particulate matter in the air.

"Our previous research showed that climate change will make photochemical smog pollution worse. This means we need to cut pollution emissions more than if there were no climate change," Adams said. "In our future research, we will see if the same is true for particulate matter and mercury."

[Fresno Bee commentary, Tuesday, Aug. 14, 2007:](#)

STEVE NASH AND MICHAEL MARSH: Sustainable dairies are achievable

We could not agree more with the conclusion of the Aug. 5, editorial ("Fresno County must consider Valley air in setting dairy regulations"): It's time for the county to enact a dairy ordinance that preserves the dairy industry as a Valley economic powerhouse, while protecting the air we breathe and the environment in which we live and raise our families.

Like the rest of Fresno County agriculture, the dairy industry has adopted cultural practices to significantly reduce emissions. In fact, Fresno County dairies operate under the world's strictest dairy air quality regulations.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District requires all new dairies to adopt "best available" controls, reducing emissions to the fullest extent feasible. Air district rules already in place are expected to reduce smog-forming emissions by about 20 tons per day.

The same is true for water quality protection, as dairies must now comply with new Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board rules, the nation's strictest dairy water regulations.

But Fresno County also has an important role. The county will soon adopt an ordinance requiring local review of new dairy projects. This will ensure that new dairies are properly planned, and that dairies and urban/suburban uses don't encroach upon each other.

This also means an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for each new dairy, which covers far more than air and water quality, but also examines odors, noise, potential nuisance, etc. An EIR is subject to public review and comment, public hearings and must include a site-specific environmental mitigation strategy. This is long overdue, and supported by the Fresno County Farm Bureau and the dairy industry.

So if dairies are already under the strictest regulations in the nation, and Fresno County is on the verge of adding an EIR to the process, why are anti-dairy groups complaining? Why all the fuss from the "Fresno Healthy Dairy Commission" -- whose ads are actually being funded by a Bay Area-based labor union?

Regardless of their motives, the commission's "facts" as related in The Bee editorial are just plain wrong. For example, the editorial called for rules to "line the waste lagoons at dairies" -- implying there is no such requirement now. Yet the Regional Water Quality Control Board already strictly requires lagoons be lined according to federal engineering standards that must fully protect both surface and groundwater.

Then there is the claim that cows should be housed indoors in airtight barns, presumably with electric lighting instead of ambient sunlight. For the sake of cow comfort and humane treatment, this plan would require air conditioning, too, since cows would no longer have access to natural ventilation.

This wasteful, fossil fuel-intensive prescription would be a disaster for the environment and the economy. The true objective of such a rule is obvious: Drive dairies away by making it too expensive to operate.

Another "modest" proposal by the anti-dairy group is to mandate covering lagoons to capture bio-gas. Estimates put this cost at upward of \$1 million per dairy. Yet this provision would have almost no effect on smog-forming emissions, because the primary sources are cattle feed and the cows themselves, not the lagoons.

The dairy industry has strongly supported developing bio-gas resources and expanded use of renewable energy and will continue to do so. But when it comes to reducing emissions, we must side with air quality research scientists and invest in strategies that actually work.

But what about the claim that these and other environmental regulations could be enacted for "2 to 3 cents per cow" each year? Ludicrous: Can anyone actually claim that environmental compliance on a 3,000-cow dairy could be achieved for \$90 per year?

First of all, the estimates are referenced to a "study" that has already been widely discredited as fundamentally biased and grossly inaccurate. The real costs of the state agency environmental regulations -- agreed upon by both the dairy industry and regulatory agencies -- are a minimum of \$50,000 per year per dairy, not including millions of dollars in "up-front costs" for environmentally friendly ponds, barns and corrals at new dairies.

Frankly, 2 to 3 cents per cow does not even cover the costs of mailing an Environmental Impact Report.

Fresno County is already an integral partner with regional air and water quality regulatory agencies. Asking the county to not only do its job, but to also do theirs is inefficient, bureaucratic and completely unnecessary.

Fresno County dairy producers are doing their part to clean the air, protect our water and follow the nation's toughest regulations, all the while creating jobs and driving the local economy. Let's help them do it by not constantly moving the target.

Michael Marsh is CEO of Western United Dairymen, representing about 1,100 member dairies in California. Steve Nash is a third-generation Fresno County dairyman and second vice president of the Fresno County Farm Bureau.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Aug. 14, 2007:](#)

'Healthier, cleaner air'

Kudos to Rep. George Radanovich for inviting Environmental Protection Agency administrator Stephen Johnson to Fresno to personally hear and see the air quality problems within the San Joaquin Valley.

Mr. Johnson's pledge to co-host a technology forum to identify innovative solutions to the Valley's air pollution problem is a step in the right direction. Still, more can be done.

As the EPA works to strengthen the national ambient air quality standard, it has a unique opportunity to restore air quality in both the San Joaquin Valley and our local national parks, including Sequoia and Kings Canyon.

Our national parks are stricken with high ozone levels -- pollution carried into the parks from the Valley by rising daytime temperatures. During the summer, ozone levels within Sequoia National Park often exceed those of Los Angeles.

While the EPA's proposed ozone smog standards are a step toward better protection for public health, they do not go far enough. More stringent standards, in addition to greater leadership and community partnerships with the EPA, are necessary to protect the health of both visitors and wildlife in the parks.

With these steps, our communities and parks can once again experience healthier, cleaner air.

*Laine J. Hendricks, M.A., Central Valley Program Coordinator
National Parks Conservation Association*

[San Diego Union-Tribune, Editorial, Monday, August 13, 2007:](#)

Salton Sink

A plan to manage lake's demise makes sense

The encouraging news is that the Schwarzenegger administration has sensibly rejected the grandiose schemes to "save" the shrinking Salton Sea at a cost of many tens of billions of dollars. Instead, state resources chief Mike Chrisman has proposed a much more modest plan that essentially would manage the demise of the man-made lake in the Imperial Desert east of San Diego.

But even this scaled-down approach would cost California taxpayers at least \$8.9 billion, and possibly billions more, over the next 75 years. Such an enormous cost cannot be justified against the modest benefits of maintaining indefinitely a much smaller inland lake. Consequently, the Legislature should move forward now with a proposed five-year, \$47 million wetlands restoration program, but defer any action on Chrisman's broader initiative.

Despite its name, this 375-square-mile body of water, the largest in California, is not a sea; it is only nominally a lake. A more accurate title would be the "Salton sink," a desert bottom that lies a few hundred feet below sea level. A century ago, the basin was flooded when the Colorado River surged through a broken levee and flowed for months into the sink.

Today the Salton Sea is shrinking due to evaporation exceeding the flow of agricultural runoff into the sink. San Diego County's historic agreement to purchase Colorado River water from the Imperial Irrigation District will further limit the amount of runoff into the sink, hastening the lake's contraction.

Motels and docks that once sat at the water's edge now stand abandoned hundreds of yards from the retreating shoreline. As the lake gets smaller, its salinity steadily increases, making it less and less habitable for fish or fowl. Regular fish kills, prompted by algae blooms, create a stench for miles. Even without the fish kills, the lake can emit an offensive odor that only the locals have learned to overlook.

This situation cannot simply be ignored, because the declining lake creates a host of new environmental issues. [A major one is that polluted dust clouds generated by the disappearing water pose a genuine health hazard to Imperial County residents.](#)

It makes sense, then, to proceed with limited habitat improvements, which the \$47 million would finance. Any further measures, such as Chrisman's plan for 158 miles of berms and a separate 52-mile barrier to divide the sea - at a cost of at least \$6 billion - must be extensively evaluated before it can be determined whether they make environmental and economic sense. We are skeptical, to put it mildly, that these initiatives can be shown to be feasible and worth the staggering cost.

With a phased approach, however, decisions on the larger elements of Chrisman's plan can be made by the Legislature in future years. Honest evaluations of each step can be done later. For now, the Legislature should abandon any notion of preserving the Salton Sea in its present state and concentrate instead on the best way to manage its demise.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, August 14, 2007:](#)

Florez stands above

No one should doubt that Sen. Dean Florez has a strong base here in Kern County. If he is ever elected to statewide office many will be proud to remember his accomplishments on our behalf.

Who can ever forget how he stood up to half the state's population when he told our neighbors to the south we didn't want their sewage sludge any longer and he facilitated our anti-sludge message at the ballot box. He clearly understands the value of protecting the integrity of our agricultural products and our groundwater.

At the same time, with his desire to improve locally what is some of the worst air quality in the nation, he brought the milk industry and others into the process of air quality regulations. This has helped greatly to put the reins on the unbridled dairy expansion we have experienced due to the shortsightedness of other local politicians. Who else has taken on this most important issue and insisted that everyone be part of the solution?

These are just a couple reasons why Florez stands above most other local leaders in recent memory.

-- TOM FRANTZ, Shafter