

Valley plans for denser growth

Blueprint endorses target of 6.8 homes per acre.

By Russell Clemings / The Fresno Bee
Thursday, April 2, 2009

San Joaquin Valley leaders opted for a middle course Wednesday in charting the region's future growth.

In a milestone for the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process, a panel of elected officials from each county voted for a future development target of 6.8 homes per acre, compared with 4.3 under current trends. They rejected a third option, supported in a recent public forum, for 10 per acre.

The vote establishes a vision of the Valley in 2050. But it only becomes reality to the extent that cities and counties throughout the region take similar action and ultimately build the Blueprint standards into their own land use plans.

"The Blueprint is a work in progress," said Barbara Steck, deputy director of the Council of Fresno County Governments and an organizer of the state-funded Blueprint effort.

The Valley-wide target of 6.8 homes per acre belies wide variations among the eight counties and within them.

Merced County, with a target of 8.6 homes per acre, is at the top, nearly doubling its current density. Right next door, Madera County's target, 4.7 homes per acre, is only slightly higher than its current 4.1.

Both officials and Blueprint planners said the burden of increased densities would fall mainly on the region's major cities, such as Stockton, Modesto, Fresno and Bakersfield. Small cities and rural areas would have lower targets.

"You're certainly not going to put high-rises into downtown Sanger, but in downtown Fresno, maybe," said Fresno County Supervisor Judy Case, a former Sanger mayor. Twelve of those present voted for the middle option. Three others -- including Fresno County's other representative, Fowler City Council Member Rico Aguayo -- favored the high-density version, as did slightly more than half of those voting in a public "summit" in January.

Before the vote, Merced City Council Member Bill Spriggs said that Valley residents may be more willing than some of their leaders to accept higher housing densities.

"I personally live on a 13,000-square-foot lot. I hate it," he said. "It's interesting that the development community seems to be married to the idea that everybody wants to live in a single-family detached house."

But Ripon Mayor Chuck Winn, who voted for the middle option, had a different view.

"I have not heard one student say they want to live downtown above a retail store," he said. "They want a three-bedroom, two-bath, three-car garage, front yard, back yard. Somewhere they can raise a family."

Growth to take middle ground

County reps vote against extremes of high-density, sprawl

By Garth Stapley
Modesto Bee, Thursday, April 2, 2009

FRESNO — In a symbolic move that could evolve into a significant regional growth strategy, San Joaquin Valley leaders Wednesday approved a compromise between status quo sprawl and a scenario that would double housing densities.

The 12-3 vote for a compromise valleywide blueprint finishes three years of debate throughout the eight-county region from Lodi to Bakersfield. Wednesday's final decision won't produce immediate results, but eventually it is expected to play a role in how state officials award housing and transportation funds.

Of seven Northern San Joaquin Valley representatives, five voted for the compromise: Stanislaus County Supervisor Jeff Grover, Oakdale Mayor Farrell Jackson, Manteca Councilman Steve DeBrum, Ripon Mayor Chuck Winn and Merced County Supervisor Mike Nelson. Stockton Mayor Ann Johnston and Merced Councilman Bill Spriggs favored the compact housing alternative.

"This is an incredible step forward," said Kern County Supervisor Michael Rubio, chairman of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council. The panel is composed of representatives from each of the counties — San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Kern and Tulare.

Panel members acknowledged significant support for the most compact alternative from the Blueprint Regional Advisory Council and from a Blueprint summit in Fresno attended by nearly 600 people. But only 361 voted at the summit, Jackson noted, adding that nearly half of the audience hailed from Fresno County.

"That wasn't representative of the entire valley," Jackson said.

Status quo growth, which no one favored Wednesday, would consume 261,300 acres of prime farmland in the next four decades, said Nate Roth of the Department of Environmental Science and Policy at the University of California at Davis. The version adopted Wednesday could reduce that by 37 percent, Roth said, while the highest density option might have reduced the loss by 54 percent.

The highest density option could have reduced homes' climate-changing emissions by 20 percent, Roth said, compared with a 6 percent reduction under the option embraced by Wednesday's majority.

Blueprint coordinator Barbara Steck of Fresno said it's not surprising that regular people frustrated with declining quality of life would want to set the most aggressive smart-growth goals. "At the political level, we understand other things are to be taken into consideration," she told the panel.

Steck and others noted that state officials have yet to determine how such regional growth strategies will affect land use decisions handled by local leaders. Some predicted that the state will force higher densities on the valley in the not-too-distant future, regardless of Wednesday's vote.

"We should be leaders and set the stage in California, not be forced into it," Johnston argued, to no avail.

Though Wednesday's choice doesn't represent the most aggressive change to sprawl, it still should make the valley's future growth 29 percent more dense, said Fresno County Supervisor Judy Case.

Anti-sprawl rules to steer Sacramento development

By Jim Wasserman

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, April 1, 2009

When Sacramento gets past the housing crash, its next wave of growth will play out under stricter rules that limit greenhouse gases and clamp down on cars, area real estate officials were told Tuesday.

Panelists at a real estate forum peering beyond the region's current downturn said state legislation to curb emissions from cars and far-flung-residential living will push more growth into existing area neighborhoods.

It's an idea that runs counter to a capital-area housing boom that spread 80,000 new houses, mostly single-family detached residences, onto empty suburban-area land between 2002 and 2007.

The region's next housing boom will – and must – rely more on trains, buses and alternatives to cars, said William Hudnut, an advocate for cities and former Indianapolis mayor credited with reviving his Midwest state capital.

"The less driving there is the less carbon dioxide that is being emitted into the air," he told a gathering of nearly 100 public- and private-sector architects, city planners, land-use attorneys, real estate consultants and elected officials. "The challenge is to reduce dependence on the car."

The notion is central to implementing the state's Assembly Bill 32, which aims to lower greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, and SB 375, which ties that goal to new housing and commercial development.

Hudnut spoke at a forum organized by Sacramento's affiliate of the Urban Land Institute, a research arm of the U.S. real estate development industry. He praised the two bills and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments' regional Blueprint for higher-density growth through 2050 as models for the nation.

"You seem to get it," said Hudnut. "A lot of the country doesn't."

Longtime Sacramento redevelopment attorney Joseph Coomes Jr., said that while the Blueprint is voluntary, "we're now getting mandatory imperatives in AB 32 and SB 375. And more imperatives will be coming down the line."

Sacramento County Supervisor Roger Dickinson told the gathering the county aims to put most of the 53,000 new homes it will need by 2030 into existing neighborhoods.

"We are very dedicated to revitalizing a lot of those older first-tier suburbs," he said. But he said the idea worries home builders and developers who find it easier to build on empty land. Also raising concerns are existing residents who don't want up to 20 percent more people living in their areas.

Nonetheless, Hudnut said the new century will be a "gargantuan business opportunity," with half of all U.S. and European growth income to come from "restorative development" in built-up areas.

"Reinvesting, rebuilding, revitalizing, redeveloping and re-engineering. We live in the 're-century,' " he said.

Government may reward car buyers

Measures offer motorists as much as \$5,000 to scrap gas-guzzlers and buy new vehicles.

By Jim Puzzanghera and Ken Bensinger

L.A. Times, Thursday, April 2, 2009

Reporting from Los Angeles and Washington -- The road to recovery for U.S. automakers could be jammed with hundreds of thousands of gas-guzzling used cars, which President Obama hopes will be traded in for more fuel-efficient vehicles -- with the lure of government money.

So-called cash-for-clunkers programs in Germany and France have worked well this year to spur new car sales. But similar initiatives aimed at reducing smog in Southern California have not fared so well in recent years. And roadblocks to a national plan abound, including its potentially huge cost.

The idea of stimulating new car sales by coaxing old cars into the salvage yard is gaining bipartisan momentum in Washington amid federal efforts to reshape an industry that on Wednesday released dismal sales figures for March.

"The simple reality is we have got to get American consumers to buy automobiles," said Rep. Candice Miller (R-Mich.)

She is among 19 lawmakers co-sponsoring a bill by Rep. Betty Sutton (D-Ohio) that would offer \$3,000 to \$5,000 to motorists who scrap an old car and buy a new one. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) is leading a bipartisan group pushing its version of the legislation in the Senate.

Either plan would cost \$1 billion to \$2 billion a year, or more, depending on who would be eligible and how many people participated.

Supporters said the legislation would help save the automakers and the environment, with both bills promoting sales and forcing higher polluting vehicles off the road.

U.S. carmakers strongly support the idea, with a GM executive Wednesday saying it could increase new car sales by 1 million to 3 million vehicles annually. That would be a huge boost for an industry now on pace to sell fewer than 10 million vehicles domestically this year. Obama on Monday touted what he called fleet modernization as a way to help the auto industry recover.

But some major barriers must be overcome.

Obama said the money would have to be carved from existing programs in the \$787-billion economic stimulus package passed in February, a potentially difficult task. Supporters said there may be as much as \$3 billion in unallocated stimulus cash. Alternatively, the program could be funded with about \$1.8 billion in stimulus money that has been rejected by governors in some states.

The Senate and House bills differ in one major way. In the House version, the cash incentive for buyers would apply only to new cars built in North America, with more money for those built in the United States. The Senate bill has no such restriction, and Feinstein said she would oppose one.

"It has to be across the board," she said. "It's the fair way to do it."

In addition, auto parts manufacturers and retailers are strongly opposed to requirements that trade-ins be scrapped, arguing that crushing perfectly good cars would simply increase the cost of parts and used vehicles.

But automakers and their supporters are excited at the prospect of federal money being used to stimulate new car sales.

"We think it's an important element to get the customer back," said Jim Farley, Ford Motor Co.'s head of marketing and communications.

He predicted the stimulus could lead to an additional 500,000 to 1 million sales a year. Mike

DiGiovanni, GM's lead sales analyst, was more optimistic, saying the most conservative versions of the plans under consideration "could be worth at least a million more sales to the U.S. industry." If a more aggressive plan, with larger cash vouchers, were enacted, the sales increase could be as large as 3 million, he said.

A lot of the excitement is based on the experience of Germany, whose government is spending about \$2 billion a year on such a program.

The country's new "scrapping bonus," which provides an incentive of about 10% of the average new car purchase price, helped boost new car registrations in February by 21%, according to German government data. The program is on track to reverse a projected 10% drop in new vehicle sales this year, said Pete Kelly, the senior director in Europe for J.D. Power Automotive Forecasting.

"We're actually seeing a market that is flat or growing, which is completely at odds with a German economy that is in quite deep trouble," he said.

A similar plan in France is projected to boost new vehicle sales there by as much as 8% this year, helping keep the market stable, Kelly said.

Barclays Capital estimated that a U.S. program similar to Germany's could boost sales by 3 million vehicles. But the increased sales would come with a big price tag: Matching that projection would cost the U.S. government \$12 billion, Barclays estimated.

The House bill offers graduated incentives to people who junk a car or truck at least 8 years old. They would get a cash voucher for \$3,000 for buying a new truck that gets at least 24 miles per gallon and was assembled in North America. A new car that gets at least 30 mpg and was assembled in the United States would qualify for \$5,000. The new car would have to cost less than \$35,000.

Feinstein's bill requires that the used car being traded in get less than 18 mpg. Cash vouchers would range from \$1,500 to \$4,500, depending on the age of the trade-in and on whether the owner buys a new or used car. The new vehicle must cost less than \$45,000 and must exceed federal mileage standards by at least 25%.

One objective of Feinstein's bill is reducing pollution. A California initiative that takes effect next year has the same goal, offering people \$1,000 to scrap an old car, said Tom Evashenk, an engineer for the California Air Resources Board.

Under the state plan, owners don't have to buy another vehicle, just get rid of their old one. The goal is to get 23,000 high-polluters off the road each year. A pilot component that would be offered in the Los Angeles area would extend an additional \$2,000 to people who also buy a car that is no more than 4 years old, Evashenk said.

Some air quality districts have run programs for years to remove high-polluting vehicles, but with modest success. From 2007 to '08, the South Coast Air Quality Management District sent letters to 15,000 motorists whose cars triggered remote emissions sensors. They were offered \$500 in free repairs, or as much as \$2,000 to scrap their cars. Only 375 people opted for the payments and the district is retooling the program, spokesman Sam Atwood said.

NM official concerned about proposed power plant

By Susan Montoya Bryan, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, April 2, 2009

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to meet with the state Environment Department about potential impacts to threatened and endangered species by a proposed coal-fired power plant on Navajo land in northwestern New Mexico.

Environment Secretary Ron Curry requested the meeting to discuss the biological assessment of the Desert Rock Energy Project, which is being developed by Houston-based Sithe Global Power and the Navajo Nation.

Curry said Wednesday the assessment indicates mercury and other chemicals will be emitted by the plant and those chemicals will have an impact on the San Juan River and the Rio Grande as well as species living there.

"New Mexico already suffers from the highest emissions of mercury in the nation and San Juan County has the highest mercury emissions in the state," Curry said. "We must do everything possible to protect our rivers, streams, fish and wildlife from impacts from the proposed facility."

San Juan County is already home to two coal-fired power plants, and critics have complained that Desert Rock would further degrade air quality and harm the environment and public health.

But Desert Rock developers maintain that the plant's emissions control equipment would make it the cleanest coal-fired plant in the nation.

Frank Maisano, a spokesman for Sithe Global, said Curry's announcement is another effort by the state to mislead people about the proposed plant.

"The modeling shows that the mercury emissions are going to be really low because we're using such advanced pollution controls," Maisano said. "Mercury, while always a concern, is never going to rise to the levels here where it would be an issue to be worried about."

George Hardeen, a spokesman for the Navajo Nation, said Wednesday that Desert Rock is the most important project the tribe has ever undertaken.

He also criticized Curry for not consulting tribal leaders regarding Desert Rock despite a bill signed into law just weeks ago by Gov. Bill Richardson to promote cooperation between state government and Indian tribes.

Jose Viramontes, a spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Albuquerque, said the agency has accepted Curry's invitation to meet.

"Any time we can get any scientific information that will increase our knowledge of potential impacts to endangered species, we welcome that type of information," Viramontes said.

The agency is reviewing the biological assessment and plans to complete a draft opinion by the summer, he said.

FirstEnergy to convert plant units to burn biomass

By M.R. Kropko, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, April 2, 2009

CLEVELAND—Electric power company FirstEnergy Corp. said Wednesday it plans to spend \$200 million to convert two units at an eastern Ohio power plant to burn renewable biomass like wood chips and crops grown as fuel.

The Akron, Ohio-based company said the conversion will make its R.E. Burger plant in Shadyside one of the nation's largest biomass facilities.

"Retrofitting the Burger Plant for biomass will expand our diverse generation portfolio even further and continue our support of state and federal efforts to increase reliance on renewable energy sources," FirstEnergy chief executive Anthony Alexander said in a statement.

During the transition, to be completed by 2013, the units can continue to burn coal. There will be test burns of the biomass fuel of varying amounts leading up to the conversion.

The plan is part of a 2005 agreement stemming from a federal court case in which FirstEnergy agreed to reduce pollution from its power plants.

The settlement between FirstEnergy, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and three northeastern states—Connecticut, New Jersey and New York—required the company to pay fines and cleanup costs at four plants. It was the second-largest federal settlement with an electric utility over air pollution.

A message seeking comment about the plans for the biomass plant was left Wednesday with the EPA media office.

Gov. Ted Strickland said the FirstEnergy move would help Ohio adapt to its new advanced energy portfolio standard, which sets yearly benchmarks for the production of cleaner energy. Renewable energy will have to make up 12.5 percent of Ohio's electricity by 2025.

"This project will help jump-start the biomass renewable energy industry here in Ohio and also serve as a model for projects throughout the U.S.," Strickland said in a statement.

The converted units will potentially have the same generating capacity as the current coal operation, enough to power 190,000 homes. Some smaller units at the plant that burn coal or oil are not part of the conversion.

The company hopes to use corn stalk or wheatgrass dedicated specifically for the plant. The crop would remove as much carbon dioxide from the environment as it grows as it would release when it's burned. The company said burning mainly biomass would produce fewer emissions than retrofitting coal production with a scrubber, a device that removes pollutants such as sulfur dioxide.

FirstEnergy had a March 31 deadline to determine the future of the plant along the Ohio River.

The company has 4.5 million customers in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

FirstEnergy shares were trading up 11 cents, or 0.3 percent, to \$38.71 early Wednesday afternoon.

Warming to bring more flooding and fire, less rain to state

By Mike Taugher

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, April 2, 2009

California may be planning to slash greenhouse gas emissions, but it might also want to get busy finding ways to beat back what already lies in store for a warmer world, a new report suggests.

"Extreme events from heat waves, floods, droughts, wildfires and bad air quality are likely to become more frequent in the future and pose serious challenges to Californians," said the report, a synthesis of 37 scientific papers.

The report, the first update of a 2006 assessment on climate change in California, reaches starker conclusions than the first report did on flooding in the Bay Area and the state's diminishing rain and snow.

Among the key findings:

Air pollution may worsen, and heat waves will be more intense, longer and more frequent, aggravating asthma symptoms and increasing infectious diseases;

Cranked up air conditioners could drive up electricity consumption by more than 50 percent by 2100, while the availability of hydropower will decrease;

Property losses due to wildfires could increase to \$2 billion a year by 2050 and \$14 billion a year by 2100;

Farmers' yields will decrease for most crops;

Doing nothing to slow greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to what scientists now say is at least a measure of inevitable warming would cost the state hundreds of billions of dollars, state leaders said.

"Taking immediate action on climate change is essential to slow the projected rate of global warming," said Linda Adams, secretary of the state Environmental Protection Agency. "We also need to make smarter decisions in order to anticipate and adapt to the changes."

Scientists believe earlier studies that predicted up to a 2 foot rise in sea level were too conservative and that a more realistic figure is 4.5 feet by 2100.

And earlier studies were inconclusive on whether California will get more or less precipitation, agreeing until recently only that more of the state's total precipitation would fall as rain instead of snow.

But it now appears the southern part of California will be significantly drier in the future, and that Sacramento will be somewhat drier, the report said.

The northern Sierra Nevada could see a little more precipitation, but overall the state will be more parched — and that will put more pressure on already-stressed water supplies, said Dan Cayan, a climate researcher at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego.

The report took two scenarios for greenhouse gas emissions — one in which emissions continue to increase in a "business as usual" fashion and another in which emissions decline by 2100 — to try to glean a realistic look into California's future.

Those scenarios would result in average temperature increases of 2.7 degrees to 10.5 degrees by 2100, and the 37 peer-reviewed studies looked into how that would affect California's coasts, water supply, health, fires, demand for electricity, agriculture and forestry industries, among other things.

It is probably the most intensive attempt yet to project climate change impacts in a particular region, but the work is heavily dependent on models that cannot be perfect.

"They're plausible, but they're not precise," said Cayan.

While much of the report strengthened the 2006 report's findings, there were a few new findings to raise new concern.

"We think that the possibility of sea level rise at a higher magnitude is greater," Cayan said. "There is more precision about the impacts of sea level rise in the Bay Area."

Rising seas threaten an estimated \$100 billion in property statewide, two-thirds of which is in the Bay Area, the report found.

"The most prominent features subject to inundation in the North Bay are the wetlands surrounding San Pablo and Suisun bays; municipal and industrial areas along the Martinez-Pittsburg corridor; the Richmond-Pinole peninsula; and areas in eastern Marin," the report said.

"In the central and south bays, a ring of developed areas currently behind levees would be newly at risk as sea level rise is expected to greatly increase pressure on existing levees and increase the risk of breaching.

Other areas, such as San Francisco airport, that are not currently protected behind levees would need levee protection," the report added.

The findings on how the state's water supply would be affected contained inconsistencies. While the thrust of the report was that less precipitation, a longer and drier summer and a severely diminished snowpack would pose severe problems, an economic analysis showed the impact would be relatively small as water is moved around the state and urban areas slake their thirst by buying water from farmers.

A UC Berkeley economist said that best-case scenario was unrealistic and that even if average years work out OK, there are likely to be more severe problems in dry ones.

"A big part of the story is not the average year," said Michael Hanemann.

The report is open for a 30-day public comment period. Comments may be made to climatechange@calepa.ca.gov.

Heat, wildfires to pump pollution, studies say

Jane Kay, Chronicle Environment Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, April 2, 2009

Longer, more intense heat waves and increased air pollution from smog and wildfires could adversely affect the health of Californians under scenarios for climate change.

Heat waves have been increasing in recent decades in the state, and scientists expect air pollution to worsen in the coming decades, exacerbated by a longer fire season.

Hospitalizations and emergency room visits increase as the temperature rises, with an influx of patients suffering from cases related to cardiovascular and respiratory disease and diabetes, as well as intestinal infectious disease.

Deaths also are expected to increase with the rise in temperature, and not all deaths would be from hyperthermia or dehydration. Most would occur in people older than 65 and who are chronically ill. Relatively young to middle-aged people also are at risk if they work outdoors or exercise strenuously.

The two-week heat wave that hit most of the state in July 2006 led to more than 140 deaths, health officials say. Daytime temperatures were high but not record-breaking; nighttime temperatures, however, were higher than ever and played a key role in the deaths.

One study found that there may have been two to three times more heat-related deaths in that heat wave that went unrecorded.

The benefits of tough state rules designed to reduce air pollution may be offset by warm sunny days, scientists say. The stagnant atmospheric conditions trap pollutants close to the ground, where they form ozone, or smog, a health threat.

Study: Global warming could make wildfires more damaging

By Gary Robbins, science writer-editor
O.C. Register Blog, Wednesday, April 1, 2009

A new report that analyzes the potential impact of climate change in California says, "wildfire risk would increase throughout the end of the century. Average annual monetary impacts due to home loss may plausibly be on the order of \$2 billion per year by mid-century and up to \$14 billion per year by the end of the century."

The report was conducted by scientists from UC Merced, the Scripps Institution of Oceanography and Cal-EPA as part of a larger look at the impact of climate change.

The study says, "Human-induced climate change may, over a relatively short period (less than 100 years), give rise to climates outside anything experienced in California since the establishment of an industrial civilization currently sustaining a state population that has increased approximately 41,000-percent since 1850.

"Changes in wildfire regimes driven by climate change are likely to impact ecosystem services that California citizens rely on, including carbon sequestration in California forests; quality, quantity and timing of water runoff; air quality; wildlife habitat; viewsheds and recreational opportunities. They may also impact the ability of homeowners and federal, state, and local authorities to secure homes in the wildland-urban interface from damage by wildfires."

National parks seek to reduce carbon footprint of workers, visitors

By Jeffrey P. Mayor, McClatchy Newspapers
In the Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, April 1, 2009

TACOMA, Wash. -- Thousands of cars, pickup trucks and minivans carry visitors to national parks in Western Washington. They leave behind tons of plastic water bottles, granola bar wrappers and banana peels.

It's a two-hour 60-mile drive for Mount Rainier National Park staff to get from the operations center in Longmire to Sunrise.

Heating the Hurricane Ridge visitor center at Olympic National Park costs almost \$12,000 a year for diesel fuel.

All the driving, waste and utility consumption - not to mention the energy to power employee computers, to buy fuel for snowplows and to haul away food scraps - spew greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. As a result, the state's three national parks have an estimated combined carbon footprint of 30,820 metric tons of carbon dioxide. That's the equivalent of a year's worth of emissions from 2,667 households, or a town about the size of Steilacoom.

The National Park Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are striving to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the Climate Friendly Parks program.

"Our national parks can be used to demonstrate the impacts of climate change," said Shawn Norton, who heads the climate program for the Park Service.

Raising the ante, Washington's Western region office wants park operations to be carbon neutral by 2016, the 100th anniversary of the Park Service's creation.

A carbon footprint estimates the amount of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and other greenhouse gases emitted. The footprints for Mount Rainier, North Cascades and Olympic national parks are produced by the more than 5 million people who visit and the functions needed to operate the more than 1.85 million acres at the parks.

Officials recognize that even if they succeed in making park operations carbon neutral, the parks still will feel the effects of climate change caused by greenhouse gases emitted beyond park boundaries.

The hope, they said, is that park efforts will inspire visitors to do their parts at home and at work to reduce emissions across the region.

IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Park officials want to reduce carbon emissions because a growing number of scientists believe greenhouse gases are responsible for changes in the Northwest climate. The result has been more frequent and stronger storms lashing the Northwest and warmer weather, resulting in more winter rain and less snow at higher elevations.

Mount Rainier is still recovering from the historic flood in November 2006, which dumped 17.9 inches of rain in 36 hours and caused \$36 million of damage.

"One-hundred-year floods are now happening every 14 years," said Paul Kennard, a park scientist.

April snowpack measurements in the Cascades and the north Sierra have declined from 1950 to 1997, said Alan Hamlet of the climate impact group at the University of Washington Department of Civil and Environment Engineering.

"By 2020, they are predicting a 27 to 29 percent loss of snowpack compared to 1980 levels," Hamlet said.

This means snow-reliant river basins, such as the Quinault, the Skagit and the Yakima, will see an increase in winter flows, peak flows earlier in the year and lower summer flows - all of which could reduce fish populations in those rivers.

'OUR RESOURCES ARE FINITE'

The effect of climate change on the parks is easy to see following each flood and by measuring receding glaciers. It's more difficult to gauge the impact on endangered species such as marbled murrelets, or the bloom of wildflowers such as Cascade aster in subalpine meadows.

"We should care because our resources are finite," said Karen Gustin, superintendent at Olympic National Park. "Being good stewards of our communities, whether a national park or a backyard, we have to be conscious of how we can protect those resources."

Chip Jenkins is the superintendent of the North Cascades National Park Complex that includes the Ross Lake and Lake Chalen National Recreation areas.

"National parks are the canary in the coal mine," he said. "We are places where there are leading indicators of what is going on in the United States. So if you are seeing changes in these parks, and we are, they are indicators of what you will see elsewhere in the country."

King said climate change is affecting the ability of park staffs to meet the parks' mandate to provide for visitors' use while protecting park resources.

"It's hard for visitors to access and enjoy Mount Rainier National Park when the roads and trails are washed out," King said. "A change of a few degrees in average temperature would certainly impair the park's plant and animal communities, glaciers and watersheds. Some species of plants and animals could be imperiled."

Park leaders said the Climate Friendly Park program will better focus efforts already under way to reduce emissions, and has required a change in thinking.

"When we started this program in 2002, the words 'climate change' weren't even to be spoken in the federal sector," said the Park Service's Norton. "Up to five years ago, only two park general management plans had the words 'climate change' in them. Now it is a required chapter."

SIMPLE IDEAS TO START

Steps to cut emissions have already been taken.

At Olympic, lights and a hand dryer in a Rialto Beach restroom are powered by a small wind-driven generator and solar panels.

"Solar might not be unique to the rest of the world, but it's something new for us at the park," said Nancy Hendricks, the park's environmental protection specialist.

A North Cascades heavy-equipment operator suggested the park could reduce the use of fuel-guzzling heavy-duty pickup trucks by using a trailer to haul tools. Smaller, more fuel-efficient trucks can pull the trailer or it can be left behind when not needed.

The worker, Reilly O'Brien, "already figured it out. He didn't have to be told to do it," Jenkins said.

At Mount Rainier, an efficiency expert is consulting on the remodeling of a Longmire office used by the interpretive staff, said Jim Fuller, the park's utilities manager. Materials will be reused for construction, triple-pane windows will be installed and restrooms will have dual-flush toilets.

"We're trying to make it a zero-energy building. We're not going to make it, but we'll get it as close as we can," Fuller said.

That philosophy - to do the most that can be done with existing resources - is the approach Gustin is taking in Olympic.

"We just have to set some reasonable goals," she said. "We have to remember what changes we'll make will be positive and get us toward our goal."

The long-term ramifications are what drive King to find solutions now at Mount Rainier.

"The scientists tell us that climate change is under way, we can't stop it at this point. But they also tell us that we can still make choices about how we live - in our homes and communities - that will affect the scope, severity and impacts of the change," he said. "Ultimately, we have to ask, what kind of world do we want our children to inherit?"

[S.F.Chronicle commentary, Thursday, April 2, 2009:](#)

Invest pollution trading dividends in clean energy industry

By Phil Angelides and Dan Kammen

A March 24 decision by the Obama administration's Environmental Protection Agency that greenhouse gases are dangerous moves the global warming discussion from assessment to action. Here is a line of action:

Use proceeds from pollution-credit trading to invest in new energy sources.

President Obama gave a historic and clear signal in his first budget plan that he intends to work with Congress, the states, local communities and business leaders to limit future greenhouse gas emissions that harm our planet. The president proposes creating a carbon-trading market that rewards environmentally friendly industries and makes renewable, nonfossil-fuel energy sources more competitive. By auctioning off pollution permits at the start of such a program, we can create a \$600 billion-plus investment pool to steer America toward a clean-energy, good-job-producing, made-in-America economic future.

Cleaning the air and arresting the degradation of our planet will help our economy. That's why we believe most of the revenue from a cap-and-trade system such as the president has proposed should be invested in domestic clean-energy solutions, such as energy efficiency, renewable power and transit. This will help accelerate the development of the nation's vast clean-energy resources and move us toward energy security, climate stability and economic prosperity.

Moving away from fossil fuels and toward renewable, low-carbon energy sources such as wind and solar - an imperative if we want a competitive economy and a habitable planet for our grandchildren - could result in higher energy costs initially, unless we invest in new clean-energy sources at the same time. That's why we should direct the profits from the pollution-credit auctions to a fund to invest in clean energy.

Increasing the production of wind, solar and other renewable energy sources will make it possible for everyone to have cheaper clean energy more quickly.

Investing in clean energy will also help our long-term economic strength by creating jobs in new industries that will outlast the fossil-fuel economy. Carbon-trading dividends can be invested in retraining workers and building green economies in the states whose once-thriving factories and cities have been hollowed out.

Our addiction to fossil fuels - and the associated \$800 billion annual price tag for imported energy - is equivalent to the need to bail out the financial sector every year and represents the single largest drain on the U.S. economy. This must, and can, end.

A cap-and-invest system can help keep America the world's leader in innovation - and make us once again the leader in the production of our own energy solutions. We can power our homes and businesses, reclaim American energy independence and protect our planet - but only if we also commit to investing in the growth of a clean energy economy.

President Obama has embraced the cap-and-invest strategy with a proposal to invest \$150 billion in carbon-auction proceeds in renewable energy solutions over 10 years. That's a start, but we can and would benefit from going even further. We believe Americans are willing to be called to action for a big and bold initiative to protect and invest in America. After all, they know that if we can find the resources to bail out AIG, we can certainly find the means to build a better economic and environmental future for all of us.

Phil Angelides, the former treasurer of California, now chairs the Apollo Alliance. Dan Kammen is a professor at UC Berkeley and a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.

[Reedley Exponent commentary, Wed. March 25, 2009:](#)

Ten Reasons I Question Environmentalists

By Paul H. Betancourt

I mentioned to a friend that I'll start believing environmentalists on issues here in the Valley when they stop taking water out of Hetch Hetchy in Yosemite National Park for drinking water in San Francisco. To me it is an issue of integrity. You can't abuse the environment to your benefit and then tell me how I should interact with the environment. She suggested I do a David Letterman style Top Ten list. So here we go-

For the record, I need to note that I think most of the environmentalists I have met are sincere. I call them true believers, not to mock them but because I do find that their passion is very similar to new converts to faith. Many are just as dogmatic. They are the New Puritans.

Ten Reasons I Question Environmentalists

#10 - I'll start believing San Francisco environmentalists when they stop taking their drinking water from a national park.

#9 - I'll start believing the French on energy and environmental issues when they turn off their nuclear reactors.

#8 - I'll start believing Europeans about organic farming when they stop chain smoking.

#7 - I'll start believing environmentalists when they start offering solutions. What I usually see is a presentation of a problem and then they jump up and down and tell us to stop it. For example, they will tell us how bad over population is. Then tell us to stop it. What kind of solution is that? It would be nice if the solutions made sense. One suggestion they had about dust on dirt roads was to water the dirt roads every day. Do you know how many miles of dirt roads there are in Fresno County? Do you know how much water that would take? Do you know how many of those roads have no traffic at all during the day? That wasn't much of a solution. Watering the roads we use makes a lot more sense. But, the farmers had to suggest that, the enviros didn't figure that one out.

#6 - Crisis du Jour: When was the last time you heard about the ozone layer or the rainforest? Remember when that was all we heard about? Did the problem go away? Did it get solved? I'll start believing the environmentalists when they stick with an issue until it is solved not skip from one issue to the next depending on their Hollywood celebrity or rock concert.

#5 - I'll start believing environmentalists when they start doing effective public education. After nearly 40 years they have failed to develop effective environmental awareness. People say they are environmentalists then they drive big SUV's. There is a disconnect.

Public education is slow and tedious work. But, as Emile Durkhiem said a century ago -"When people are moral no laws are necessary. When people are not moral no laws are sufficient." The point is that when we have a well developed public awareness about the environment we would need endless laws and endless debates to scare us into compliance.

#4 - I'll start believing the environmentalists when they stop acting like Chicken Little. I am now hearing reports that global temperatures will go up 20 degrees and the ocean levels will rise a meter in this century. Perhaps. But, they have been so wrong for so long I wonder how they have any credibility left. Malthus, two hundred years ago, and Paul Ehrlich, thirty years ago, said that population growth would outstrip our ability to feed ourselves. They were wrong. How can we believe these alarming claims when they have been so wrong for so long?

#3 - I'll believe the Environmentalists when they have a view of the Big Picture. They teach us that life is an inter-connected web and then they focus on their special interest. I have sat in too many meetings where specialists have dug in their heels, not willing to compromise or even discuss any other issues until their concern was fully settled. Environmental problems are, by nature, system wide problems. They need big picture solutions. For example, hybrid cars will

save gas. What are we planning to do with all those used hybrid batteries?

#2 - I will start believing the environmentalists when they start living themselves the life style they recommend for the rest of us. I really respect the advocates who actually ride their bicycles. Don't live a modern lifestyle and then complain about everyone else living one.

And finally, #1- I'll believe the environmentalists when they realize they have already won.

The air is cleaner and our rivers don't catch fire like they once did. There is tremendous public support for the environment. The tide is in their favor. They should celebrate their victory and lead us onward and upward instead of beating us over the head and dragging us from one crisis to the next.

I want to be a caretaker of the environment. When I used to hike as a kid I was taught to leave my campsite cleaner than when I got there. I am looking for practical solutions to the problems we face. I'll start believing my environmental friends when they start being reasonable.

Paul Betancourt is a Kerman farmer and community activist. He is the ranch manager of a 765-acre family farming operation, and is presently pursuing a Masters degree in International Relations. He is a former Fresno County Farm Bureau president, and served on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, Central Valley Regional Water Board, school board, and several other local entities.

[Sacramento Bee commentary, Thursday, April 2, 2009:](#)

Some dim bulbs, it seems, behind this 'green' idea

By George F. Will

Fervent. 1. Hot, burning, glowing, boiling.
– Oxford English Dictionary

"Fervently" is how America will henceforth engage in talks on global warming. So said the president's climate-change negotiator Sunday in Germany, at a United Nations conference on reducing carbon emissions.

This vow was fervently applauded by conferees welcoming the end of what the Associated Press called the Bush administration's "eight years of obdurate participation" in climate talks.

Reducing carbon emissions supposedly will reverse warming, if it resumes after the current period without warming, a period that began, according to statistics published by the World Meteorological Organization, 11 years ago. Regarding the reversing, the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change has many ambitions, as outlined in a working group's 16-page "information note" to "facilitate discussions." For example:

"Tariffs can be lowered to grant special preference to climate-friendly goods, or they can be maintained at high levels to discourage trade in GHG (greenhouse gas)intensive goods and services." The working group says protectionism "in the service of climate change objectives" might virtuously "shelter domestic producers of climate-friendly goods."

Furthermore, using "border carbon adjustment," a nation might virtuously "impose costs on imports equivalent to that (sic) faced by domestic producers" operating under a carbon tax. Or a nation with a cap-and-trade regime regulating carbon emissions by domestic manufacturers might require foreign manufacturers "to buy offsets at the border equal to that (sic) which the producer would have been forced to purchase had the good been produced domestically."

Cynics will see only potential for mischief by governments, including the U.S. government, using such measures to give a green patina to protectionism. Meanwhile, the U.S. government is having its own problems with one "climate-friendly good" that might not be. Last week the New

York Times carried this front-page headline: "The Bulb That Saved the Planet May Be a Little Less Than Billed."

The story recounted some Americans' misadventures with the new light bulbs that almost all Americans – all but those who are filling their closets with supplies of today's incandescent bulbs – will have to use after the phaseout of today's bulbs in 2014. (You missed that provision of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007?)

A San Francisco – naturally – couple emerged from Al Gore's movie "An Inconvenient Truth" incandescent with desire to think globally and act locally, in their home. So they replaced their incandescent bulbs with the compact fluorescents that Congress says must soon be ubiquitous. "Instead of having a satisfying green moment, however," the Times reported, "they wound up coping with a mess."

Although supposed to last 10,000 hours and save, the Times says, "as much as" \$5.40 a year in electricity costs, some bulbs died within a few hours. Some experts, reports the Times, "blame the government for the quality problems," saying its push to cut the bulbs' prices prompted manufacturers to use inferior components.

Furthermore, some experts have written a guide saying the new bulbs require "a little insight and planning." The Times says that "may be an understatement."

The bulbs, says the Times, "do not do well in hot places with little airflow, like recessed ceiling fixtures," and some do not work "with dimmers or three-way sockets." And: "Be aware that compact fluorescents can take one to three minutes to reach full brightness. This is not a defect."

Well, if you say so. Because all fluorescents contain mercury, a toxic metal, they must never be put in the trash, so Home Depot and other chains offer bins for disposing of dangerous bulbs. Driving to one of these disposal points might not entirely nullify the bulbs' environmental benefits.

Besides, the Times summarizes the Environmental Protection Agency's helpful suggestions for coping with the environmental dangers caused when one of these environment-saving bulbs breaks: "Clear people and pets from the room and open a window for at least 15 minutes if possible. Avoid vacuuming. Scoop up larger pieces with stiff paper or cardboard, pick up smaller residue with sticky tape, and wipe the area with a damp cloth. Put everything into a sealed plastic bag or sealed glass jar. In most cases, this can be put in the trash, but the EPA recommends checking local rules."

Worrywarts wonder what will happen when a lazy or careless, say, 10 percent of 300 million Americans put their worn-out bulbs in the trash.

Stop worrying. What do you think? That Congress, architect of the ethanol industry and designer of automobiles, does not think things through?

[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, April 2, 2009:](#)

Nozzle delay a wise compromise

Gas station owners need more time to get their pumps in compliance.

The California Air Resources Board has wisely agreed to delay enforcement of rules that require gas stations to install new pollution-control nozzles on their pumps. The deadline was Wednesday and many of the state's 11,000 gas stations had not met the requirement.

The main reason is the cost of the enhanced vapor-recovery nozzles. The high-tech system costs about \$11,000 per pump, or about \$80,000 for the average station, according to state officials. That's a hefty investment for small business owners, especially in this economy.

Under the regulations, station owners who had not complied faced fines of hundreds of dollars per day or even station closures.

The enforcement delay makes sense. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who urged postponement, said the most cost-effective nozzle system was not certified by the air board until last year.

The governor asked the Air Resources Board to delay imposing penalties for six months to a year. In addition he has asked the Legislature to pass an urgency measure that would provide financial assistance to station owners who cannot secure financing.

Even before the governor's request, the air board had anticipated that some owners would miss the deadline and had urged them to work with their local air districts to avoid fines.

No one should doubt the public health or environmental benefits of the new nozzles. They will eliminate 25 tons of smog-forming, cancer-causing and lung-searing pollution statewide every day. In the San Joaquin Valley, with its terrible air quality, that would be very helpful.

But because of the demand for the nozzles, the cost has been driven up and there's been a delay in getting them installed, even for stations that already have their permits. And the permitting process to get the nozzles has been excruciatingly slow.

The goal of the ARB must be to encourage compliance, not to close businesses and throw people out of work. The delayed announced Wednesday is a good step in that direction.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Thursday, April 2, 2009:](#)

Leaders need to look to future

Our leaders advocating the North County Corridor are living in the past and projecting that past far into the future. The stock market and housing market did that and look at the result.

Energy demand and fuel prices will greatly increase in the future, and thus demand a major change in transportation and housing patterns. We need policy-makers who plan for that, not those whose main source of campaign funds is developers.

Residents have a lot at stake since much of their food and water comes from the prime farmland projected to be lost to pavement. In Modesto, about half of the city water supply comes from groundwater, and 60 percent of that comes from farmers' flood irrigation. The great majority of such irrigation water either produces food or provides groundwater.

We need to greatly increase population densities in the cities, thereby making mass transit economically feasible. In the process, we will reduce smog, keep food cheap and guarantee a large supply of groundwater to carry us through droughts. The only way to do that is to replace politicians who are locked into the past.

Vance C. Kennedy, Modesto

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses EPA could replicate air pollution regulations using California as a model. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Podría EPA igualar reglas para la contaminación partiendo del modelo de California

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, March 31, 2009

La Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA) anunció que planea aprobar restricciones similares a las que California impone a barcos contaminantes. EPA dijo que en coordinación con Canadá exigirá que todo barco contaminante cambie al llegar a 200 millas náuticas de las costas su consumo de diesel por otras alternativas que reduzcan emisiones de sulfuro, dióxido de carbono y óxido de nitrógeno, que son algunos de los peores contaminantes del aire. California informó por su parte que una ley estatal de la que EPA tomó el ejemplo, y que entra en vigor en el 2012, quedará sin efecto en 2015 para permitir que la ley de EPA sea uniforme a lo largo de las costas del país. Los barcos y miles de camiones de carga en los puertos se traducen en la mayor fuente de contaminación en California.