

Will poor take the brunt of global warming fight?

By Jim Downing

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, June 11, 2009

A collection of environmental justice groups has sued the state Air Resources Board for allegedly failing to ensure that the state's war on global warming won't disproportionately hurt poor people.

The complaint mainly targets the emissions-trading framework – known as cap and trade – adopted by the board in December. The system, the plaintiffs argue, would tend to concentrate air pollutants in low-income communities and would be ineffective and unenforceable. This would violate Assembly Bill 32, the 2006 law that requires the state to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, they said.

Air board spokesman Stanley Young said the agency has addressed vulnerable communities at every step as it has implemented AB 32.

The suit was filed Wednesday in San Francisco Superior Court. It is the second concerning AB 32. Several business and taxpayers groups sued the board last month for allegedly failing to provide certain details about administrative costs of the global warming fight.

Report: Bay Area has ample room to grow

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, June 11, 2009

The Bay Area has ample room within its existing communities to house and employ the 2 million new residents projected to call the region home by 2035, according to a report unveiled Wednesday.

Titled "Grow Smart Bay Area," the Greenbelt Alliance's new study makes the case that the Bay Area can say no to suburban sprawl and still accommodate new residents and jobs.

Alliance researchers consulted with planning experts and analyzed the development potential of some 40,000 vacant or underutilized sites located near existing transit and other public services.

Researchers identified seven "smart spots" where they believe higher density development makes sense, including along San Pablo and Telegraph avenue corridors through Oakland and Berkeley, and swaths of low density swaths near BART stations in southern Alameda County.

In Contra Costa, the alliance concludes that more intense development could occur near BART stations in Walnut Creek, the former Concord Naval Weapons Station and in Pittsburg.

Smart growth proponents say attractive, walkable neighborhoods near public transit with a range of home sizes and where residents can work and shop nearby reduce traffic congestion, crime and air pollution, and allow for more efficient delivery of public services.

The 50-year-old alliance has for many years advocated the siting of new homes, shops and offices within city limits as a means to curb suburban sprawl and protect open space. It has been one of the most vocal proponents of growth boundaries including Contra Costa County's urban limit line.

But the latest report signifies the alliance's intent to ramp up the political pressure on local and state leaders to implement smart growth policies.

"I see the stars aligning for smart growth," Greenbelt Alliance Executive Director Jeremy Madsen told several hundred people gathered in San Francisco on Wednesday morning in the famed Carnelian Room with its panoramic view of the Bay. "At the federal, state and local levels, we are increasingly seeing a willingness to use legislation to encourage smart growth."

The concept has undeniably gained momentum, fueled, in large part, by concern about the Bay Area's infamous traffic congestion and the rising costs of providing services such as water, roads, transit and schools.

A regional coalition called the Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Communities, Contra Costa County and its cities, among other regions statewide, have adopted smart growth blueprints in the past few years.

While the blueprints are advisory, the most significant smart growth legislation is a bill signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last year that ties state transportation dollars to local land use decisions.

Smart growth proponents also expect the state's new greenhouse gas reduction regulations will spur the adoption of further policies that encourage the construction of housing, shops and offices near transit.

Read the Greenbelt Alliance's new growth report at www.growsmartbayarea.org.

Study: Clean energy will stimulate Calif. economy

By Jason Dearen, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, June 11, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO -- A more aggressive use of clean energy would help California emerge from its multibillion dollar budget deficit by creating jobs and lowering energy costs, according to a University of California study released Wednesday.

The study determined that moving half of California's electric power needs to renewable energy sources such as wind, solar or biomass would help create half-a-million jobs over the next 40 years.

David Roland-Holst, a UC Berkeley economics professor and the study's author, predicted aggressive state legislation meant to curb greenhouse gas emissions would create an enormous new clean energy market and spur innovation to better harness renewable resources.

"It's an irresistible opportunity for the next breakout in technology," said Roland-Holst. "California will deliver a market, mandating a standard which will compel energy users to adopt technology in same way fuel efficiency standards forced people to buy new cars."

Roland-Holst said his study is the first to use a wide-ranging economic forecasting tool developed at UC Berkeley to study the potential effects of clean energy on the entire California economy.

The study looked at several different scenarios of renewable energy use in California over the next four decades.

If the state were to continue with its current energy demand and reliance on fossil fuels, the study predicted, California would have to import more fuel, exposing the economy to less stable prices.

On the other hand, using clean sources for half the state's electric power while increasing efficiency by 1.5 percent each year would create 500,000 new jobs with a \$100 billion payroll, the study found.

The speed with which California and the nation can meet these aggressive clean energy goals was part of a debate Wednesday in San Francisco between Chevron Corp. CEO Dave O'Reilly and Carl Pope, executive director of The Sierra Club.

Both men agreed that renewable energy will play a major role in the country's future, but had very different timetables for reaching clean energy goals. The debate was organized by The Commonwealth Club.

O'Reilly said he does not believe clean energy sources will allow the U.S. to reduce its carbon emissions by more than 20-25 percent by 2050. Pope said he believes emerging and still undiscovered renewable energy technologies will allow for an 80-90 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by the same year.

"I disagree that renewables can replace a fossil fuels-based economy," O'Reilly said. O'Reilly said he believed that reduction needs to occur, but believes a lower amount of energy will come from renewables, and that more will be derived from natural gas, or nuclear power.

Meanwhile, a separate study released by the Pew Charitable Trusts on Wednesday showed that the nation, led by California, was already seeing the economic benefits of an emerging clean energy industry.

The Pew study found that the U.S. clean energy industry created jobs at a rate faster than overall job growth between 1998 and 2007. In California, clean energy created jobs at a rate of 7.7 percent during that time compared to 6.7 percent for jobs overall.

Roland-Holst said California's passage of AB32, also known as the Global Warming Solutions Act, has created the environment for a booming clean energy industry. The law seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the state 30 percent by 2020

President Barack Obama has said he wants the U.S. to derive 25 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2025. Congress is currently mulling legislation that would put a national clean energy requirement in place for all electrical utilities.

Edison to decommission coal-fired Nev. power plant

By Felicia Fonseca, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Thursday, June 11, 2009

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. -- The owners of the shuttered Mohave Generating Station in Laughlin, Nev., said Wednesday that they will decommission the coal-fired power plant that once supplied electricity to 1.5 million homes.

Southern California Edison operated the 1,580-megawatt plant since it came on line in 1971, and the company owned 56 percent of the facility on the Colorado River.

Edison shut down the plant in 2006 because it needed pollution-control upgrades to comply with a 1999 Clean Air Act settlement, a new water supply and pipeline upgrades costing \$1.1 billion.

The plant's owners said they will decommission the plant and remove the generating facility from the 2,470-acre site. The dismantling is expected to start later this year and take about two years and \$30 million to complete. Transmission lines and a switchyard will remain on site.

The plant's operating permits will be terminated next year.

Without a buyer for the plant, Edison spokesman Gil Alexander said the utility was left with two options - to decommission the plant and either sell the property or construct a renewable energy project.

"The owners have concluded that selling the plant is not a viable option," Alexander said.

Edison has studied the property, its topography and the climate and found that portions of the site could be used to generate solar power, but more detailed assessments are needed before a decision is made, Alexander said.

The 21 employees still working at the Mohave site will be offered other positions within the utility for which they are qualified, he said.

The Mohave plant had been one of the largest sources of pollution in the West. Environmentalists for decades blamed it for degrading views at the Grand Canyon and said it emitted high amounts of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and fine particulates.

They sued under the Clean Air Act to force the plant to add modern pollution controls like scrubbers, a filter system and new burners to reduce emissions by Jan. 1, 2006, or shut down. Edison had planned to upgrade and restart the plant but said later that year that it needed too many repairs for the effort to go forward.

Roger Clark, air and energy director for the Grand Canyon Trust in Flagstaff, one of the groups that sued, said he's pleased the owners will dismantle the plant and are considering renewable energy.

"It's the final chapter on the story of Mohave as a coal plant," Clark said. "Until the owners decided to go ahead and decommission it and take it apart, there was always a chance someone could buy it and crank it up again."

The Salt River Project, which owns 20 percent of the plant, had sought to take over operation from Edison, but abandoned the effort in 2007 after its offer to buy Edison's ownership interest was rebuffed.

Other owners of the plant included Nevada Power Co. with 14 percent and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power with 10 percent.

The plant had been fueled by coal from the Hopi and Navajo reservations in northeast Arizona, mixed with water and transported by a 273-mile pipeline to the plant. When the plant closed, so did the Black Mesa Mine in Kayenta, delivering a substantial blow to the economies of the tribes.

George Hardeen, a spokesman for Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr., said the tribe held out hope that Mohave might reopen, but none of the talks bore fruit. The tribe has not been able to replace the \$29 million in annual coal revenues from the mine that supplied coal exclusively to Mohave.

UN climate chief: Rich nations short on CO2 goals

By Arthur Max, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Thursday, June 11, 2009

BONN, Germany -- Japan unveiled a new target Wednesday for reducing greenhouse gas emissions 15 percent by 2020, but the plan was slammed by environmentalists and the U.N. climate chief as leaving the industrial world dangerously short of its pollution goals.

Prime Minister Taro Aso said in Tokyo the plan was ambitious and in line with efforts by the United States and Europe to trim carbon emissions over the next decade. He said Japan calculated its target on a 2005 base year - but environmentalists said that move was designed to deliberately mask the real effect of the Japanese cut.

"We all must make a commitment to tackle the problem of global warming," Aso said.

Environmentalists attending U.N. climate negotiations in Bonn said the reduction amounted only to 8 or 9 percent cut compared with the more widely accepted base line of 1990.

Japan already has committed to reduce its emissions by 6 percent by 2012 under the 12-year-old Kyoto Protocol. Activists said the pledge to cut emissions a further two percent over the next eight years "lacked ambition" and could lead to a retreat by other countries.

Yvo de Boer, general secretary of the U.N. Convention on Climate Change, said emission reduction plans submitted so far leave industrial countries "a long long way from the ambitious reduction scenarios" that scientists say are needed. He appeared taken aback by the limited scope of the Japanese announcement.

"For the first time in 2-1/2 years in this job, I don't know what to say," he said.

When pressed, De Boer said pledges by industrial countries fell far short of the 25 to 40 percent reductions in emissions by 2020 that U.N. scientists say is required to prevent potentially disastrous effects of climate change. Those effects could include a rise in sea levels that will threaten coastal areas, more extreme weather, the extinction of many plant and animal species and the spread of human diseases.

De Boer said the scientists' range provides "a beacon for what industrial countries need to do."

De Boer said Japan's targets referred only to domestic actions, and he hoped Tokyo will factor in more measures later to further reduce Japan's carbon footprint. Those could include better farming and forestry practices to absorb carbon from the air and buying credits by helping poor countries reduce emissions and deforestation.

Activists accused Japan of "playing a numbers game" by using 2005 as its base line.

"(Japan is) hiding its lack of ambition behind a smoke screen," said Kim Carstensen, the climate change director for the World Wildlife Fund for Nature.

Kimiko Hirata, of the environmental group Kiko Network, said 2007 was a record year for greenhouse gas emissions in Japan, and its emissions now stand 7 percent higher than in 1990.

The new target "will seriously harm the negotiations" for a new climate change deal, she said, predicting that Japan's limited commitment could affect the pledges of other industrial countries.

Carstensen said latest calculations indicate the industrial world will reduce emissions only by 5 to 12 percent from 1990 levels.

Japan was the latest of several industrial countries to announce emissions targets that have disappointed negotiators from developing countries.

The United States has not made a formal pledge at the U.N. talks, but the U.S. Congress is working on legislation calling for a 17 percent cut by 2020. It also uses 2005 as its base year.

The Kyoto Protocol required 37 countries to reduce emissions by a total 5 percent by 2012. Negotiators from 192 countries hope to complete a successor to Kyoto at a meeting in December in the Danish capital, Copenhagen.

The U.S. rejected the Kyoto Pact and the federal government made no effort during the Bush administration to cut carbon emissions.

"The picture is not yet complete," De Boer told reporters about goals for the new treaty.

In Brief

State Highway Agency To Reduce Mowing

Washington Post Thurs., June 11, 2009

The Maryland State Highway Administration is implementing a mowing reduction program along roadways to save money and "go green."

The agency estimates that a 10 percent reduction in the number of acres mowed annually, which totals roughly 8,500 acres, will also allow the state to stay within its budget and reestablish vegetation and forested areas.

Mowing in some areas will be eliminated, and other areas will get cut periodically, once in the late spring or early summer and once in the fall. Reduced mowing will occur along wide medians and right shoulders along a variety of selected interstates and primary routes. Safety is the primary consideration in determining when, how and where to reduce mowing.

Long-term benefits include improved water and air quality, officials said. Meadow plants and trees decrease storm water runoff better than mowed turf, and the growth of more trees and plants helps remove carbon dioxide from the air, replenishing oxygen and reducing the effects of greenhouse emissions.

Ash cloud released by Four Corners Plant

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Thursday, June 11, 2009

FRUITLAND, N.M.—Four Corners Power Plant operators blame equipment failure for a cloud of black ash released by the coal-fired power plant earlier this week.

Plant spokesman Nathan Tohtsoni says it's not clear how much ash was released.

He says equipment designed to retain it unexpectedly shut down Tuesday, sending particulate ash—a fine powder made up of pulverized coal—into the air around the plant in northwestern New Mexico at Fruitland.

Tohtsoni says the problem was quickly resolved.

He says a report would be sent to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The ash came from one of the plant's five units, which Tohtsoni says was taken out of service afterward.

The 2,000-megawatt plant is operated by Arizona Public Service Company.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Thursday, June 11, 2009:](#)

Why environmental movement was right

By Ed Begley Jr.

A funny thing happened on the way to the economic downturn. As our iPods were getting smaller and smaller (along with our home values and 401(k), people began to worry about all they've been consuming.

Somewhere along the way people actually started to recognize that less can indeed mean more. It's something I've practiced for many years -- and I couldn't be happier that the nation seems to be joining in.

I have always been inspired by the lessons I learned from my sensible, thrifty parents -- and spurred by my desire to see those values embraced universally.

From my parents' Depression-era perspective, buying and using only what you need, turning off lights and re-using everyday items just made people better citizens.

Back then, they called it "common sense." We didn't know how important these actions were to the environment. But we knew what they meant to our pocketbooks -- and we understood the idea that using less ensured that our neighbors would also benefit.

And that's the example that I've always tried to set in my own life and share with others. When it comes to the environment, take the baby steps first.

Of course, today I drive an electric car powered by the sun, my home is highly energy efficient and I contribute precious little to landfills. But I've had 40 years of time to work toward these goals.

The average household can start with a single compact fluorescent light bulb or a solitary recycling bin -- and the benefits of these actions will become apparent almost immediately. What's good for the environment is also good for the bottom line.

Today, due to the current economic climate, Americans are rediscovering the most basic of environmental lessons. We're recognizing that less is the new "more."

New limits on credit may have forced us to lower consumer spending habits, but we're discovering that our lives can become enriched through less consumption. If "stuff" really made us happy, then there would be nothing but happy people living in Beverly Hills and unhappy people living in the bush. Which is not to say that I live a life of compromise -- far from it. I have a home, a computer, a fax machine, a cell phone.

As I tell friends who ask... "I can still give you a cool beverage and a warm shower; I'm just going to do it more efficiently." That is the heart of a "less is more" approach.

If the past 40 years have taught us anything, it's that opponents of environmental policy didn't see the connection between a healthy environment and a healthy economy. Policies and protections put in place to preserve our world have not crippled business, destroyed entrepreneurial motivation or damaged the nation's economic vitality.

In fact, just the opposite has occurred. There are four times the number of cars in Los Angeles today than in 1970, yet we have half the smog. And we didn't go broke doing it.

Today, there are more rising companies, developing technologies and burgeoning businesses focused on environmental concerns than at any time in our history.

It may feel like it's been a long four decades, but now we really are witnessing a convergence of environmental, business, social and political trends that was only a fleeting hope in 1970. As evidence, I point to a fantastic new effort I was privileged with helping to launch earlier this month.

Announced on April 8, San Diego's "Stand for Less" campaign creates an unprecedented public-private partnership. Organized by the California Department of Conservation, the collaboration includes the City of San Diego, the San Diego Association of Governments, the California Energy Commission, the California Air Resources Board, the California Public Utilities Commission, the Center for Sustainable Energy California, the San Diego Water Authority, San Diego Gas & Electric and others.

A focused effort to educate San Diego citizens on how to lead more sustainable lifestyles, "Stand for Less" creates a holistic resource for the community to learn how to increase energy efficiency, protect and conserve water resources, engage in recycling and preserve clean air. Surveying the launch event on a crystal blue San Diego day, I couldn't help but think of how far we have come.

Though we face many challenges today, I am filled with hope that by Standing for Less we are all learning to live larger. In that sense, "Less" has truly become the new "More."

Ed Begley Jr. is an actor and longtime environmentalist.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, June 11, 2009:](#)

Clean-air record streak at 10 days

By Mark Grossi

Since 1990, how many times has the San Joaquin Valley gone 10 days without a federal air violation in June? Never. Not until this June.

There haven't been any federal violations this month, due to an unusual weather pattern. How unusual? It hasn't hit 90 yet in Fresno.

Violent thunderstorms, breezy afternoons and a few goose pimples at night. As a friend says, "If it stayed like this all summer long, we'd have 10 million people here."

It's not all that unusual to get a week of cool, turbulent weather in June. But you don't usually see it continue this long.

If I were going to bet, I would say the streak will continue today. But I also would bet that most of July will be bleeding red with federal violations.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, June 11, 2009:](#)

Problems with blowers

Leaf blowers, when used with concern for those close by, can be a useful tool in cleaning up leaf debris or cut grass. But we all know, as we drive around the city, that most blowers are not used with concern for anyone around the user.

My wife and many others living in Fresno have asthma or respiratory problems and deserve to have clean air to breathe, and as we all know Fresno's air is among the worst. We need to attack this problem of pollution now, not from the hereafter.

George Marshall, Clovis