

Horses, mules get supplies to firefighters working Lion Fire in Sequoia National Forest

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, July 29, 2011

Thirty horses and mules are helping get supplies to the 55 firefighters working the 16,350-acre Lion Fire in Sequoia National Forest, officials announced.

The pack train, which includes animals from seven national forests in California, is hauling about 1,200 pounds of food and supplies per trip.

"Pack animals have been used in remote parts of the Sierra Nevada for generations," said Michael Morse, wilderness and pack stock program manager for Inyo National Forest. "By supplying the firefighters with horses and mules, we are able to both minimize the use of motorized equipment in the wilderness and pass on packing skill to the next generation of wilderness managers."

The packing effort is being coordinated by the U.S. Forest Service's regional pack stock program.

A trip takes about nine hours round-trip and can supply a crew of 20 people for three days. It is also used when it is too smoky for helicopters to supply crews.

The Lion Fire, which began July 8 near Lion Meadow in the Golden Trout Wilderness part of Sequoia National Forest, reached Sequoia National Park on Monday in the backcountry of Mineral King, south of Farewell Gap.

The fire, presently at 16,350 acres, continues to grow. It is 15 percent contained, according to forest officials.

On Tuesday, firefighters created fire breaks around the historic Quinn Patrol Cabin on Quinn's Peak near Soda Butte. The cabin was constructed in 1906 and was used by the U.S. Cavalry as a patrol cabin for the recently formed park.

The cavalry was responsible for patrol and protection prior to formation of the National Park Service in 1916.

Forest officials said fires are a natural ecological process in the Sierra Nevada that help shape the wilderness vegetation.

The public is invited to a meeting Monday in Lone Pine to get an update on the fire. The meeting is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. at the Boulder Creek Resort, 2550 S. Highway 395.

Questions about the current situation, future strategy and about the smoke effects will be answered by district rangers, incident commanders and representatives.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials expanded their health cautionary statement to include mountain and foothill areas in more counties because of smoke from the fire.

It now includes the mountains and foothills of Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno and Tulare.

In Tulare County, Kennedy Meadows, Ponderosa, Johnsondale, Springville, Camp Nelson and Three Rivers are being affected.

The Valley floor continues to see no effects.

"We are monitoring the situation to ensure protection of public health of all residents in the area," said Rick McVaigh, the air district's deputy air pollution control officer. "We will continue to provide updates until the fire is out."

Residents are urged to take precautionary measures for their local air quality conditions and health situations. The smoke contains particulate matter dangerous to human health.

Air effects from the smoke will vary depending on current weather conditions and how many acres continue to burn.

Wildfire fouls Valley air

Central Valley Business News.com, Late Thursday, July 28, 2011

A health cautionary statement from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is expanding to include mountain and foothill areas in more counties because of smoke from the so-called "Lion Fire," which continues to burn in the Golden Trout Wilderness area of the Sequoia National Forest.

The health cautionary statement is in effect for the mountains and foothills of Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Tulare (especially Kennedy Meadows, Ponderosa, Johnsondale, Springville, Camp Nelson, and Three Rivers) and Kern counties. However, there continue to be no impacts on the Valley floor.

"We are monitoring the situation to ensure protection of public health of all residents in the area," says Rick McVaigh, the air district's deputy air pollution control officer.

Residents in affected areas are urged to take precautionary measures as appropriate for their local air quality conditions and health situations. Whenever residents smell smoke or can see smoke at ground level in their immediate area, they should take action to avoid exposure, the air district says.

The fire is in rugged territory.

A pack train of 30 horses and mules is helping to supply firefighters who are working to contain the three-week old Lion Fire in the Golden Trout Wilderness, the U.S. Forest Service says. The animals are hauling food and supplies into the Lion Meadow area where 55 firefighters are based.

"Pack animals have been used in remote parts of the Sierra Nevada for generations," says Michael Morse, wilderness and pack stock program manager for the Inyo National Forest.

Hauling approximately 1,200 pounds per trip, the pack train can supply a crew of 20 people for three days. The trip takes approximately nine hours round-trip, making for a long day in the saddle. "This is not easy work," says Pat Baily, wilderness manager for Los Padres National Forest. "You have to have a passion for it."

Smoke contains particulate matter, a form of pollution that is dangerous to human health. High levels of particulate matter – small pieces of airborne material such as soot and ash – can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

In the event of exposure to smoke, people with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion. Everyone else should reduce prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion.

New mileage standards aim for less fuel, pollution

The Associated Press

In the Stockton Record, Friday, July 29, 2011

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama and automakers ushered in the largest cut in fuel consumption since the 1970s on Friday with a deal that will save drivers money at the pump and dramatically cut heat-trapping gases coming from tailpipes.

The agreement pledges to double overall fuel economy to 54.5 mpg by 2025, bringing even greater under-the-hood changes to the nation's autos starting in model year 2017 and introduce more electric and hybrid technology to pickup trucks. Cars and trucks on the road today average 27 mpg.

"This agreement on fuel standards represents the single most important step we have taken as a nation to reduce our dependence on foreign oil," Obama said, sharing the stage with top

executives of 11 major automakers and a top automobile workers union official, before a backdrop of some of the most cutting-edge cars and pickup trucks on the road.

"Just as cars will go further on a gallon of gas, our economy will go further on a barrel of oil," Obama said.

When achieved, the 54.5 mpg target will reduce U.S. oil consumption from vehicles by 40 percent and halve the amount of greenhouse gas pollution coming out of tailpipes. It builds on a 2009 deal between the Obama administration and automakers, which committed cars and trucks to averaging 35.5 mpg by model year 2016.

For American families, the president said the agreement – which will be subject to a midcourse review – means filling up the car every two weeks, instead of every week. That would save \$8,000 in fuel costs over the life of a vehicle purchased in 2025, compared to a 2010 model, a White House analysis said.

The changes also are likely to push up the cost of a new vehicle, but just how much is unclear because the regulation still has to be written. That process will get started in September.

The mileage target announced Friday isn't exactly what consumers will see in their future cars. A formula that gives credits to manufacturers for electric cars, the use of low-emission air conditioning refrigerant and technology that shuts down engines at traffic lights means the actual fuel economy is likely to come in closer to about 40 mpg. Stickers on future cars and trucks will also display different numbers because they'll be based on real-world mileage tests.

The deal was less than what environmentalists and public health advocates wanted but more than desired by the Detroit Three – General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. In a letter to the president last week, Michigan lawmakers called the White House's initial proposal of 56.2 mpg "overly aggressive," after automakers had said they'd work to get vehicles averaging 42.6 to 46.7 mpg. Green groups, meanwhile, had pushed for a 62 mpg target by 2025.

For Obama, who watched his campaign promise to limit global warming pollution die when Republicans retook control of the House, the compromise provides a way around political roadblocks and a down payment on climate change.

The deal also provides an answer to critics who say the president has not done enough to address high gasoline prices. It promises to reduce demand at a time when Republicans in Congress have criticized Obama for being too slow to drill and not opening up more areas to oil and gas exploration after the massive Gulf oil spill last year.

And at a time when a consensus in Congress is elusive on the debt ceiling and curbing the federal deficit, the president said the fuel economy deal was a "valuable lesson to" Washington.

"You are all demonstrating what can happen when people put aside differences," Obama said. "These folks are competitors, you've got labor and business. But they said we are going to work together to achieve something important and lasting for the country."

For automakers, particularly the Detroit Three, the deal signaled a turnaround from the days when they resisted boosting fuel economy targets, arguing that consumers would not buy smaller and more efficient cars, and that the technology to reduce fuel consumption was too expensive.

That stance has been challenged in recent years by a 2007 energy law that mandated the government evaluate and set new fuel economy targets, by a Supreme Court decision that said the Environmental Protection Agency had the authority to control global warming pollution from vehicles, and by a state – California – that has set stricter emissions standards than the rest of the country.

Mary Nichols, chairman of the California Air Resources Board, said auto companies wanted "one set of cars they could sell anywhere in the U.S" and the changes the deal would bring would meet state targets. "We will accept standards that were announced today as being compliant with California standards through 2025 unless and until there is a change," she said.

A \$62 billion taxpayer-funded bailout for GM and Chrysler added to the White House's leverage.

Some environmentalists lauded the agreement Friday, but said that manufacturers owed taxpayers a bigger deal after bailing them out.

"An auto industry that owes its survival to taxpayer bailouts ungratefully flouted the public's demand for fuel efficiency and less pollution, fighting for loopholes until the bitter end," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign.

For consumers, the new requirements are well beyond the gas mileage of all but the most efficient cars on the road today.

By the time the new standards take effect, the government expects gas-electric hybrids to make up about half the lineup of new vehicles, with electric vehicles making up about 10 percent of the fleet.

Currently hybrid and electric vehicles combined amount to less than 3 percent of U.S. vehicle sales, according to J.D. Power and Associates.

They'd also force auto companies to get rid of some less-efficient models as they try to boost gas mileage of their lineups. But that depends on how quickly new technology can be developed. Pickup trucks, which rank as some of the biggest sellers for American automobile companies, get a slight reprieve under the agreement. They will only have to increase fuel economy in the first five years by 3.5 percent. After that time, they will have to match the 5 percent annual increase for cars.

Automakers are far better prepared with a much stronger line up of small cars, as well as hybrid and electric vehicles. General Motors and Nissan are selling mass-market electric vehicles, while Mitsubishi, Ford, Toyota and others are about to enter the market.

Nissan's vice president Scott Becker in a statement said the Obama administration has issued some extremely challenging greenhouse gas reduction and fuel economy improvement targets, but Nissan was "up to the task."

Nissan introduced the LEAF – the world's first and only 100-percent electric car for the mass market – in December 2010. More than 4,000 of the 99 miles-per-gallon vehicles are already on the road.

GM and Ford already have small gasoline-fueled cars that get 40 mpg or better on the highway, and Chrysler will have one next year. Small car sales are up 21 percent so far this year, showing consumer interest is up.

That is perhaps the deal's best selling point.

"It is hard to call higher fuel economy standards job killing when all of the automotive companies support it, and the United Auto Workers support it," said Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass.

Ron Bloom, the White House's chief negotiator on the deal, said Friday it was "an example of industry starting to lead the parade."

Study says all-electric cars may not be the answer to air pollution

Central Valley Business news.com, Late Wednesday, July 27, 2011

Those expecting all-electric cars to help clean California's air could well be disappointed says a new study.

That's because buyers of the still-pricy cars don't necessarily live where the air is the most polluted, like the Central Valley.

The report by the Greenlining Institute of Berkeley is the first ever to examine the impact of electric vehicles on communities of color, it says.

Cost and lack of consumer education, the report argues, may blunt the impact of all-electric cars in the communities that need them the most, it says.

“Electric vehicles will do little to clean the air if the only people buying them are in Malibu and Marin,” says report author C.C. Song, green assets fellow at the Greenlining Institute. “We all want cleaner air and less use of fossil fuels, and electric vehicles and strong mileage standards can play a big part, but communities of color – 60 percent of California’s population – may miss out on the benefits of electric cars.”

Polls have shown Californians of color to be more concerned about air pollution than whites, making them a natural market for EVs and hybrids, but despite this, 70 percent of hybrid owners are white, which does not bode well for widespread adoption of EVs in communities of color, the report says.

Affordability remains a major concern, and the long-term future of federal and state tax incentives and rebates is uncertain, cautions the report.

It says “creative efforts” will be needed to increase all-electric vehicle market penetration in communities of color, including education about how the “smart grid” can help minimize charging costs.

Texas company fined for California air pollution violations

Central Valley Business News.com, Late Wednesday, July 27, 2011

Key Energy Services LLC, based in Midland, Texas, with West Coast offices in Bakersfield, has been fined \$52,000 by the California Air Resources Board.

Through an audit, CARB says its investigators found that Key failed to test its California fleet’s diesel engine emissions, as required by California law.

“Controlling diesel exhaust is vital to the health of every Californian,” says CARB Enforcement Chief James Ryden. “It also insures that all businesses that operate diesel vehicles are held to the same standard.”

The violations by Key Energy Services, which services the Central Valley’s oil fields, occurred in 2008 and 2009.

The settlement also requires Key Energy Services to:

- Provide testing and general compliance records to CARB for the next two years;
- Properly label engines to ensure compliance with the engine emissions certification program regulations;
- Instruct vehicle operators to comply with the state’s idling regulations;
- Within one year, have all appropriate staff attend a diesel education and technology class that instructs adherence with state emission laws; and,
- Complete heavy-duty diesel engine software and control technology upgrades in compliance with regulations.

Diesel exhaust contains a variety of harmful gases and over 40 other known cancer-causing compounds, says CARB.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, July 31, 2011:](#)

House policy riders jeopardize California's air and water

Under the guise of bolstering the economy, House Republicans are trying to push through dozens of policy riders that would undercut the nation's environmental laws.

They would reduce the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's ability to protect air and water resources, slash the Interior Department's Land and Water Conservation Fund and make it easier for mining companies to carry out "mountaintop removal" -- in which entire tops of mountains are sheared off to get at the coal underneath.

These measures alone should be reason enough for the California congressional delegation to reject what is being proposed in the EPA and Interior Department spending bills. But here is one more.

Rep. Jeff Flake, a Republican from Arizona, has added a rider that would end a moratorium on uranium mining around Grand Canyon National Park. If it were to become law, 1 million acres around the Grand Canyon would be opened to uranium mining.

Uranium tailings have already polluted large stretches of the Colorado River, a water source for roughly 15 million Southern Californians and millions of others in Nevada and Arizona. This is a huge problem.

But to add insult to injury, multinational mining companies would be able to get new hard rock mining leases on public lands without having to pay basic royalties.

House Republicans from California have tended to vote en masse on bills. Their positions on these policy riders will be a crucial test. Where are their loyalties?

What is more important: allegiance to party or the quality of water their constituents drink?

All Californians should watch their votes closely.

[Sacramento Bee editorial, Sunday, July 31, 2011:](#)

California deserves credit for fuel economy triumph

In a stunning turnaround, most of the American and foreign auto industry has agreed to strict nationwide fuel standards that will double gasoline mileage by 2025.

On Friday, President Barack Obama, the state of California and major automakers – with the notable exceptions of Volkswagen and Daimler, which makes Mercedes – announced the accord covering models starting in 2017 and extending through 2025.

It's an important victory for consumers, the environment and national security. By 2025, vehicles sold in the United States will average 54.5 miles per gallon, double the current 27 miles.

It might not have come about without California's tough stand on reducing greenhouse gases, The California Air Resources Board took the lead by implementing 2002 legislation by then-Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, to force automakers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from tailpipes.

Gov. Jerry Brown rightly crowed about the agreement last week, calling California's greenhouse gas emission standard that formed the underpinning of the accord an example of an "intelligent regulation." Brown also gave credit to his predecessor, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who pressed for the tough standard despite former President George W. Bush's opposition.

When the Bush administration balked at permitting California to move forward with its own standards, Schwarzenegger and then- Attorney General Brown sued. Obama reversed course, not only granting California's authority to act, but also adopting California's standard as the national standard.

But that standard covers models only through 2016.

Recently, automakers began seriously working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the California Air Resources Board to develop fuel economy and greenhouse gas standards for vehicles that will roll off assembly lines in 2017 and remain in place through 2025.

As part of the agreement, automakers will drop any litigation over California's standards. Importantly, California will not cede its rights to pursue its standards if some future administration in Washington decides to capitulate, according to California's Air Resources Board. Additionally, California plans to press for deeper cuts in smog-forming auto emissions, seeking 75 percent reductions by 2022.

The tougher fuel standards announced on Friday undoubtedly will add to the cost of vehicles. But consumers will quickly recoup those costs - and end up saving money - by reducing their demand for gasoline.

There are other real costs associated with not acting, including the impact on people's health from auto-caused smog and the threat posed by global warming, caused largely by greenhouse gas emissions. And as Americans have learned all too well, there is a tragically high price to pay for dependence on oil from countries that are contemptuous of the Western way of life.