

## **Winds kick up but storm milder than expected so far**

By John Cox

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Jan. 27, 2021

Strong winds knocked out power around Bakersfield and snow shut down traffic on the Grapevine Wednesday but the consensus was things could have been worse — and that it was too soon to declare they won't be.

A wind advisory and a winter storm warning were in effect in parts of the county Wednesday as gusts of up to 55 mph hit the Arvin area and snow fell at 3,500 feet, with more expected as low as 2,000 feet.

Authorities cautioned travelers headed across mountain passes to stay informed of changing weather conditions and keep extra food, water and blankets in their vehicles.

Not as much rain came down by mid-afternoon Wednesday as had been expected, which came as a relief to almond growers after last week's wintry weather knocked down substantial portions of some local orchards.

Farmers said the ground was drier this time and so winds Tuesday night and Wednesday weren't generally enough to blow trees sideways.

"It hasn't been a devastation because there hasn't been enough rain," McKittrick-area almond grower Don Davis said.

A California Highway Patrol spokesman said there had been few problems in the Bakersfield area apart from downed power lines on Ashe Road and a 53-foot tractor-trailer that swiped the side of a mountain while taking Highway 178 through the Kern River Canyon to avoid storm-related closures elsewhere.

Public Information Officer Roberto Rodriguez said Highway 58 through the Tehachapi area was open Wednesday but that the Grapevine closed at about 4 a.m. because of snow near Pyramid Lake.

"Right now we're just kind of waiting to see what happens," Rodriguez said midday Wednesday. He advised travelers call 1-800-GAS-ROAD (427-7623) for traffic updates.

The wind kicked up so much dust across the region that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District urged local residents to use caution and avoid exposure to small particulate matter blowing in the air.

The district said the health advisory was put in effect Wednesday and would remain in effect through Thursday morning.

A spokeswoman for Pacific Gas and Electric Co. said the utility was busy Wednesday responding to storm-related power outages and damage in Kern.

Some 2,000 local PG&E customers lost power at some point during the day, spokeswoman Katie Allen said by email. Nearly 270 of them were without electricity for at least two consecutive hours, she added.

"We have experienced dozens of outages in Kern related to the storm," Allen wrote. "We have additional crews working in the area to ensure we quickly and safely respond to outages associated with damages from the winter storm. It is an all-hands-on-deck situation."

Elsewhere across the state weather conditions were more intense. The Associated Press reported an atmospheric river system from the Pacific Ocean shut off power to tens of thousands of residents in the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento areas.

Gusts near Lake Tahoe reached 125 mph, the AP reported, and there were concerns about potential debris flows in areas burned by last year's wildfires. The news service said blown-over trees had disrupted traffic in some places and a 75-mile stretch of Highway 395 closed because of snow.

Meteorologist Jim Andersen at the National Weather Service in Hanford said a "wind shadow" effect along coastal mountains had again denied Kern rain by squeezing moisture from storms coming from the west.

Though not the inch and a half forecast as recently as last week, there's still a good chance up to an inch of rain will fall in Bakersfield through Friday, he said, as an active weather system perched over Central California pushes south into the heart of Kern. He predicted relatively moderate temperatures due to expectations for cloud cover.

Before the storm leaves the area Friday, Andersen said, it's likely to dump eight to 14 inches of snow in the Kern County mountains above 4,500 feet, and as much as four inches between 2,000 and 4,500 feet. He noted the winter storm warning remains in effect through 4 a.m. Friday.

The good news is what the storm appeared to be doing for the Sierra Nevada snowpack that provides much of the Central Valley's drinking water and irrigation supplies.

Recent models had suggested the Kern River Basin's snowmelt stood at 35 percent of normal prior to the storm. Andersen said there's a good chance the number will rise as this storm's relatively low snow level prevents new precipitation from washing out existing snow.

"In a way we've kind of dodged the bullet on this," he said, adding that the steadiness of the rain this week has largely lowered chances of landslides on mountains scarred by wildfires.

"How this is transpiring here is really a good thing," he said.

## **New electric vehicle fast chargers installed at Tejon Pass Rest Area, throughout Central Valley**

The Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Jan. 27, 2021

The Tejon Pass Rest Area will be the recipient of new electric vehicle fast chargers that will assist drivers of those automobiles traveling through the Central Valley or over the Grapevine.

According to a news release from the California Department of Transportation, the charging station is one of nine that were recently installed by Caltrans throughout the state, including nine new stations in the Central Valley.

"Fast chargers are essential to continue growing EV adoption in California and meeting our state's goals for combating climate change," Caltrans Director Toks Omishakin said in the news release. "Expanding the availability of convenient fast-charging stations along state highways is significant for the future of California transportation."

There are four chargers at the Tejon Pass Rest Area on the southbound side of Interstate 5, a popular stopping point for travelers located about 60 miles north of Los Angeles and 40 miles south of Bakersfield, the news release states. Caltrans District 7 Director Tony Tavares said there will be 18 other chargers staggered 40 miles apart in the region, as Caltrans attempts to reduce "recharging concerns for plug-in EV drivers on long-distance trips through the Central Valley."

The Level 3 DC fast chargers provide an approximate 80 percent charge in 30 minutes to electric vehicles with fast-charging capability, the news release states. The chargers have universal connectors and are able to serve all electric vehicles on the market, including Teslas with an adapter.

The \$4.5 million project was funded by Caltrans and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in Fresno, according to the news release.

Here are the new charging stations in the Central Valley, according to Caltrans:

- Junction Highway 58/Highway 184 in Bakersfield
- Caltrans Maintenance Station on Highway 41 and next to I-5 in Kettleman City
- Caltrans Maintenance Station, 805 S. Lexington St., next to Route 99 in Delano
- C.H. Warlow Rest Area NB/SB Highway 99 in Kingsburg
- Philip S. Raine Rest Area at SB Highway 99 near Tulare
- Philip S. Raine Rest Area at NB Highway 99 near Tulare
- Caltrans District 6 Office, 1283 N. West Ave., next to Highway 99 in Fresno

• Caltrans Maintenance Station, 125 W. Almond Ave., next to Highway 99 in Madera

## **More prescribed burning, logging sought after nightmare wildfires of 2020**

By John Holland

Modesto Bee, Monday, Jan. 25, 2021

A task force has called for more prescribed burning, logging and other actions to deal with the wildfire fuel choking California forests and rangeland.

The Governor's Forest Management Task Force released a plan earlier this month that affirms an emerging consensus on what to do about the crisis.

The 46-page plan recognizes that the fuel has grown so dense in part because of exclusion of gentle fires that used to clear the undergrowth. They were sparked by lightning and Native Americans.

The plan follows a 2020 that was the worst fire season on record — more than 4 million acres of timber, brush and grass statewide. About a tenth of this was in an expanse from western Stanislaus County to the fringes of the Bay Area.

The task force endorsed an August 2020 agreement between the state and federal governments to roughly double fuel treatment to about 1 million acres per year. The new plan calls for achieving this by 2025, about half on federal land and the other half on private land protected by Cal Fire and other agencies.

Prescribed burning, done for decades in national parks, would expand in national forests and on private rangeland. Logging would increase about 20 percent on national forests, aligning with the thinning already done on private timberland. The largest single owner is Sierra Pacific Industries, whose operations include two sawmills in Tuolumne County.

The plan also calls for increased efforts to reduce flammable trees and brush around rural homes, and to bolster firefighting crews and equipment.

The recommendations drew qualified support from state Sen. Andreas Borgeas, R-Fresno, whose district includes the central Sierra Nevada and eastern Stanislaus County. He would like to see more logging, which has been curtailed since the 1990s due to environmental rules.

"Responsible timber harvesting is essential in order to reduce the density of dead or dying trees that increase the amount of fuel for a fire," Borgeas said in an email to The Modesto Bee.

### **Experts from many fields**

The task force includes representatives of state and federal agencies, academia, environmental groups, the timber industry and other interests.

Some environmentalists oppose increased logging to deal with the wildfire threat. But the new plan was endorsed by the Nature Conservancy, a national group.

"We look forward to working with the administration and the Legislature to implement the plan and shape a resilient future for people and nature," said Jay Ziegler, director of external affairs and policy, in a news release from the task force.

The state's beef cattle industry has long touted grazing as a way to keep wildfire fuel in check. This happens both on private land flanking the Central Valley and on national forest grazing allotments.

In a statement, the California Cattlemen's Association welcomed the new plan and Gov. Gavin Newsom's proposed wildfire spending in his 2021-22 budget.

It also urged "legislative and regulatory reforms that encourage smarter forest and rangeland management practices that provide multiple benefits to wildlife, water quality and security, as well as climate mitigation and resilience."

### **Intense fires warm the planet**

The plan aligns with efforts to reduce the carbon emissions that have contributed to a general warming of the global climate. Over-dense forests spew huge amounts of carbon when they burn. Trees remaining in thinned-out timber stands capture carbon in their limbs and roots.

Intentional fires have played a role since the 1970s in Yosemite and other national parks, where logging is not allowed. The new plan calls for increasing the practice on other land, tapping the expertise of tribal governments and other partners.

“Fire has been part of California’s landscape since time immemorial,” said Jared Blumenfeld, secretary for environmental protection under Newsom. “Our critical partnerships with tribes across the state have taught us that our relationship with forests requires a deep and holistic engagement which at its core incorporates traditional ecological knowledge and modern science to protect the health of California’s most vulnerable communities.”