

# Weekly ReCAP for February 1, 2019

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**Next CPC meeting Feb. 7, 2019, Main Library, San Andreas, 1:30 p.m.**

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**Next BOS meeting Feb. 12 – agenda will be available online.**

**PC meeting Feb. 14 – canceled**

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## Coalition upset with General Plan update

**The Valley Springs News, Friday, January 25, 2019**

Members of the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC) asked the Board of Supervisors to improve the county and the General Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report at the Board meeting on Tuesday, January 22.

Neil McKeown noted that, “By mitigating the significant environmental impacts of development at the general plan level, the County would expedite lawful future approvals of specific plans, subdivisions, and use permits.”

Finding fault with the notion that Calaveras County’s vague and sometimes non-existent rules are helping to protect property rights, he noted that they have resulted in “an average home value that is \$150,000 below the statewide average.”

According to CPC Facilitator Tom Infusino, “The County can do more to avoid the 25 potentially significant impacts of the General Plan,” simply by following the recommendation of local and regional agencies, organizations, and individuals who have proposed ways to reduce the impacts of future development.”

During the course of the General Plan Update, such recommendations have poured in from the Agricultural Coalition, the Local Agency Formation Commission, and from regular folks who worked on their local community plans.

CPC member Jack Norton described programs from Cal Fire, the United States Department of Agriculture, Caltrans, and the Department of Water Resources that fund local improvements in participating counties. He concluded, “Please commit to seeking these funds to help mitigate the impacts of development when you approve the General Plan Update.”

Tom Griffing explained that, “By participating in the programs noted above, Calaveras County can get back some of our state and federal tax dollars, and put them to good use in our communities.” Griffing estimated that the households of Calaveras County combined pay an average of 187 million dollars in local, state and federal taxes annually.

Last week, Planning Director Peter Maurer contended that the General Plan Update would be followed by the “inevitable” litigation, and the Board of Supervisors declined to schedule a study session on the General Plan Update. The notion that the County had given up on doing the plan correctly upset Joyce Techel from Valley Springs. She pointed out that she and her friends had worked hard over the last twelve years to get the County to complete a legally valid general plan and EIR. As to Director Maurer’s assertion that litigation was inevitable, Ms. Techel concluded by quoting

Inspector Harry Callahan in the 1983 movie *Sudden Impact*, "Go ahead, make my day."

These comments followed delivery of a 12-page memo to the Board of Supervisors listing the improvements needed in the General Plan Update Draft EIR. According to the CPC, these improvements would promote economic development, ensure environmental protection, support the exercise of property rights, and secure outside funding to improve local conditions. In the memo, CPC Facilitator Tom Infusino warned that, "These benefits of the general plan will only happen if the Board of Supervisors engages now to direct its staff and consultants to fix the plan and EIR."

The Calaveras Planning Coalition is the flagship endeavor of the Community Action Project (CAP). CAP's mission is to protect and improve the natural and built environments in Calaveras County by empowering people to claim their rights and participate in local government. You can view the CPC's 12-page memo to the Supervisors, and all the supporting attachments, at their website: [www.calaverascap.com](http://www.calaverascap.com) .

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## **New board fast tracks commercial pot study**

**By Nick Baptists / The Valley Springs News / January 25, 2018**

Updating the Calaveras County General Plan and a study session addressing emergency preparedness for the upcoming fire season will take a back seat to reconsider bringing back commercial cannabis production.

Last year's Board of Supervisors ended commercial cannabis production on a 3-2 vote after a two-year trial under an emergency ordinance passed by a previous board. By a 3-2 margin Tuesday, the board voted to move up a study session from March to February to reconsider allowing commercial cannabis production in the county.

November's election for District 5 supervisor proved to be the difference. First-term Supervisor Benjamin Stopper cast his vote with Board Chairman Jack Garamendi and Vice Chair Merita Callaway on Tuesday to fast track the commercial cannabis study session.

"I'd like to bring back an era," Supervisor Callaway said near the end of Tuesday's meeting asking for the board to be polled on moving up the commercial cannabis study session.

She was in favor of an earlier study session so the board can give direction to staff so an ordinance can be developed.

Callaway said she would support a pilot program with a limited number of growers including those who were registered under the emergency ordinance or who had submitted applications.

District 4 Supervisor Dennis Mills said fire preparedness and the General Plan update take priority in expressing his opposition to Callaway's proposal. District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli also opposed the change in priorities.

A week earlier when the board was setting study session priorities, Callaway said it was important to tackle the commercial cannabis issue before the cannabis growing season begins.

Earlier in the meeting, the board voted 4-1 to refund \$940,043 in grower registration and renewal fees paid prior to the 2018 board voting for the ban. Mills was the dissenting vote. He asked for an audit before refunding any of the monies.

"This program itself is over and I don't want to continue it at all," Tofanelli said. He was not in favor of doing an audit. "I'd like to see it closed out and move on"

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## **PG&E Officially Files For Bankruptcy**

[01/29/2019 7:52 am PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

San Francisco, CA — After signaling the intention earlier this month, today Pacific Gas and Electric filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

The move came as the utility is inundated with lawsuits and wildfire liabilities that it estimates could equal around \$30-billion. CAL Fire is also still investigating PG&E's culpability related to the Camp Fire in Paradise last year. 86 people died and 14,000 homes and other buildings were destroyed.

The company indicates that it plans to eventually emerge from bankruptcy, and in the meantime will continue to prepare for the upcoming summer fire season.

John Simon, PG&E Interim CEO, states, "Our most important responsibility is and must be safety, and that remains our focus. Throughout this process, we are fully committed to enhancing our wildfire safety efforts, as well as helping restoration and rebuilding efforts across the communities impacted by the devastating Northern California wildfires. We also intend to work together with our customers, employees and other stakeholders to create a more sustainable foundation for the delivery of safe, reliable and affordable service in the years ahead. To be clear, we have heard the calls for change and we are determined to take action throughout this process to build the energy system our customers want and deserve."

Governor Gavin Newsom also released a statement, reading, "My administration will continue working to ensure that Californians have access to safe, reliable and affordable service, that victims and employees are treated fairly, and that California continues to make forward progress on our climate change goals."

It remains unclear what the decision's exact impact will be related to fines and penalties that the utility has been ordered to pay fire victims over the past couple of years.

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## **California Marijuana Industry Could See Tax Break**

[01/29/2019 8:24 am PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

Sacramento, CA — A group of Democratic lawmakers are introducing legislation that could provide a boon to California's cannabis companies.

Led by Assemblyman Rob Bonta of Oakland, the legislators would like to temporarily eliminate the state's \$148 per pound cultivation tax, and reduce the state's excise tax on retail sales from the current 15-percent to 11-percent. It is one of the early pieces of legislation receiving buzz at the state capitol this session.

The lawmakers note that the industry is struggling due to high taxes and red tape, and the increased costs are making it difficult to compete with the illegal cannabis market. Last year Governor Jerry Brown's administration estimated that marijuana revenue would bring the state \$630-million, but the final figure was closer to \$355-million.

The proposed tax reductions would span for three years. California voters approved the legalization of marijuana for recreational use during the November election of 2016.

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# State Announces New Sped Up Wildfire Management

[01/29/2019 7:41 pm PST](#)

Tracey Petersen, MML News Reporter

Sacramento, CA — Designed to protect communities from devastating wildfires as witnessed in the past several years, California wildland managers plan to speed up logging and prescribed burns in the state.

The wildfire prevention effort was announced Tuesday at a press conference in Sacramento that included new CAL Fire Director Thom Porter and Keith Gilless chair of the state board of forestry and fire protection. It's a reboot of a similar effort that officials scrapped 12 year ago. The new plan is to create a single environmental review process to cover vegetation reduction projects, fuel breaks and restoration projects.

Environmental groups are critical of the new approach noting that the focus should be on protecting homes from wind-driven embers. Porter counters that it needs to be a systematic approach and this is one aspect, "There is no one approach or one silver bullet that's going to fix the problem. The problem is in some cases a human and community problem and in other areas it's a lack of adaptiveness to forest ecosystems that have evolved for thousands of years with fire. We've kept fire out of them, so what we're doing is we're bringing back active management in areas that need some healthy forest treatment."

The plan is to complete the new version of review in the next year with the aim of doubling the state's forest management efforts to a half-million acres of non-federal land each year. It is a goal originally set by former Governor Jerry Brown. In recent months, President Donald Trump has criticized California officials for not doing a good enough job managing forests.

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## Drones To Aid In Wildfire Prevention

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[01/30/2019 6:30 pm PST](#)

Tracey Petersen, MML News Reporter

Sonora, CA – While Pacific Gas & Electric Co. (PG&E) was back in a U.S. courtroom a day after filing for bankruptcy, California's top utility regulator was addressing the issue of wildfire prevention to law makers.

The company was trying to convince a judge at a hearing Wednesday not to order dramatic steps aimed at preventing its equipment from causing more wildfires. At the same time, state lawmakers questioned the state's top utility regulator as to whether the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) is acting fast enough to mitigate future fire damage. The commission's president Michael Picker relayed details about wildfire safety efforts and PG&E's bankruptcy to law makers. He revealed that it would take as many as 20,000 workers to inspect every utility pole and wire in the state, which he says will not work. Instead, he suggested regulators might turn to drones to monitor the equipment.

Meanwhile, some 1,000 lawsuits have been filed demanding the nation's largest utility pay for damages caused by the deadly and devastating wildfires in the state. The lawsuits involve thousands of people,

companies, cities and counties, and claim the utility's equipment caused wildfires. Plaintiffs range from a rancher's claiming a \$3,000 loss to insurance companies' demands for billions of dollars in reimbursements for payments to policyholders. PG&E lawyers have filed denials of responsibility

As reported [here](#) on Tuesday the utility filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy cited about \$30 billion in potential liability for fire related lawsuits.

## **Coalition Wins Homeless Housing Grants, Takes On Affordable Housing Issues**

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[01/30/2019 4:55 pm PST](#)

Tori James, MML News Reporter

Sonora, CA – Nearly \$2 million in funding flowing into the Mother Lode for homeless housing relief is channeling through a coalition also addressing affordable housing.

In an interview with Clarke Broadcasting, A-TCAA Housing Director Denise Cloward explains the new funding sources are coming down through the Central Sierra Continuum of Care (COC), a four-county planning body for service providers and others touching the homeless communities in Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa and Tuolumne.

The COC shares responsibilities, governance, and structures along with systems operations planning, which includes a homeless management information system to help serve constituents across county lines. While it has been around for about a decade, collaborating and sharing funding across the rivers, Cloward confides that two sizable recent grant awards are generating a good deal of attention from current and prospective partnering entities.

The first of the two grants is a nearly \$1.3 million Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) grant. Split evenly into four chunks of about \$300,000 each, each of the counties will use the monies differently. Tuolumne County is leveraging the grant with No Place Like Home funds. "We are working with the Stanislaus Housing Authority to purchase a 10-unit apartment complex," Cloward enthuses. "Some of the units will be dedicated for emergency placements for individuals and families and others for chronic mental health and illness issues, so we will have Health and Human Service providers going to all those units very consistently."

### **Tiny Homes For Temporary Housing**

She adds that Calaveras County is using its HEAP funding to build nine tiny cabins that will be scattered throughout the county, some on congregational properties, and three on the Blue Mountain Coalition for Youth and Families in West Point. The plan triggered a decision by the county probation department to apply \$50,000 of its community corrections partnership funding towards installing cabins for early release inmates next to the former jail.

The second grant, \$562,000 from the California Emergency Solutions and Housing (CESH) program, will help expand the COC's management and planning capacity to extend homeless prevention efforts as well as provide additional rental emergency services throughout the four counties.

As far as the faces of homelessness these days, Cloward says they cover a wider range of folks and that more families are among them. The shelters in downtown Sonora and downtown Jackson, consistently full with 30 beds apiece, were in December more than half populated by children. "Maybe ten years ago there were single beds for single males, females and we continue obviously to prioritize families with young children, and it has just put even more of a strain on the single population — and then, of

course, there is a lack of emergency shelter beds as well – it is very difficult.”

Cloward notes that training and outreach ahead of last week’s point-in-time homeless count along with COC’s ability to use that data along with what it captures and tracks in its own system are key to successful planning and grant seeking efforts.

### **Addressing An ‘Overwhelming’ Housing Crisis**

Rising public awareness of increasing housing crisis-driven impacts is critical to finding solutions, according to Cloward, who says the coalition’s interrelated scope ranges from serving the long-term homeless and those at risk to transitioning, affordable and workforce housing solutions.

“It is no shock, ten years in after people complaining about lack of affordable housing units, that it has become something that is so overwhelming,” she states. Optimistically, she points to 15 bills dedicated to affordable housing that Governor Jerry Brown signed and Governor Gavin Newsom’s Executive Order towards providing transparency of available land in all counties, including which properties are county-owned.

Cloward hopes more legislation comes down the pike offering incentives for workforce housing builders. “There’s all levels of housing that have to be built not just homeless shelters, not just tiny cabins for emergencies, but for families that are working...making a decent wage but that is still not enough to ever own a home,” she stresses. “Supply and demand is off and adding to the supply is a great idea at all levels, whatever that looks like for each county,” she continues. “And for the folks that are struggling...doing well and working and trying to find those units, they stay in a holding pattern for a lot longer than they used to, because of the [high] rents and lack of units.”

While finding affordable, viable land and incentivizing larger project builders to take on the work are major hurdles, Cloward acknowledges that an immense number of affordable funding sources are becoming available. Not only could COC be a conduit, she says, “Collaborating together and working across counties for larger projects — and going in together on those applications — is the best way to build workforce training housing.”

For more information on Central Sierra COC’s workings and current projects, [click here](#).

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## **CSERC To Sue Tuolumne County Over General Plan?**

[01/31/2019 11:59 am PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

Sonora, CA — Tuolumne County’s new General Plan could soon see a lawsuit from a Twain Harte based environmental organization.

The board of supervisors unanimously approved the General Plan Update on January 3, and the following day it was filed with the county clerk. That move initiated a 30-day statute of limitations for filing of a CEQA lawsuit challenging its Environmental Impact Report. The General Plan serves as a constitution for growth and development.

Board Chair Karl Rodefer confirms to Clarke Broadcasting that a lawsuit is anticipated. He says, “We did get notified, through a letter, that CSERC does intend to sue about the EIR. We don’t have any details. It was just a notification letter. We’re looking forward to seeing what the details are, and we’ll deal with it. I’m pretty confident that our General Plan is a tight plan.”

CSERC is the acronym for the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center.

The General Plan Update had been in the works for the better half of a decade. It was also endorsed by

the Tuolumne County Planning Commission. Arguments were made that the old plan was outdated and in need of a revamp.

CSERC Director John Buckley was not immediately available for comment regarding the letter. He had argued during public hearings that the plan leaned too ‘pro-development.’

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## Local experts tackle replanting in Butte Fire footprint

- [Enterprise report by Davis Harper](#)
- Jan 30, 2019 Updated Jan 30, 2019

Fuels in the 2015 Butte Fire footprint are growing back, and local experts are discussing strategies to manage the land before the next major wildfire breaks out.

Contained in October 2015 after burning over 71,000 acres, the Butte Fire was followed by drought and epidemic beetle infestation over the next two years. These events killed off many living conifers that were already struggling to survive, according to Pat McGreevy, a grant writer and member of the Calaveras-Amador (CalAm) Forestry Team, a collective of foresters and fire-prevention specialists.

Without large-scale salvage operations taking place in the years following the fire, “Dead trees were left to rot on the stump and understory brush to grow unchecked,” McGreevy said.

“The Ponderosa pines are not returning, and the Butte footprint is converting from a coniferous forest ecotype to flammable brushland,” McGreevy said. “Without intervention, we can expect the frequency of wildland fire in central Calaveras County to increase each year as the brush grows.”

A number of wildland fires have ignited in the Butte Fire scar since the fire, according to Central Calaveras Fire and Rescue Protection District Chief Jeff Stone.

The Butte Fire footprint makes up a sizeable portion of the district’s service area, and the agency responded to 51 fires last year.

While imperative, intervention at this point is a complicated task, McGreevy said.

County and private efforts to remove hazardous trees along roads and power lines have littered the landscape with rotting logs and slash – fire hazards that require complex solutions for removal, McGreevy said.

“Felling rotten trees with a chain saw is dangerous business as the feller has little control over the direction fall,” McGreevy said. “Thus, many trees get hung up in the canopy and must be pulled to the ground. And after the decaying trees are on the ground, there are few places to haul them as they have little or no commercial value.”

On Jan. 11, the CalAm Forestry Team met with Robert Smith of Smith’s Grinding, an “environmental land clearing” contractor on the outskirts of Mountain Ranch, to discuss the challenges of replanting the Butte Fire footprint.

Smith has been clearing a number of Butte Fire-damaged properties for private landowners.

The first stop was a private parcel a mile west of the Central Fire Station.

Leased to Central Fire, the property also serves as a lumber yard for a nonprofit, volunteer-driven wood delivery program formed by the district.

After walking the property and studying Smith's work, the CalAm team was in agreement that the parcel is ready to replant conifers and oaks that stood before the Butte Fire.

Based on McGreevy's observations, "Fire-killed trees on the property were felled and the remaining live trees were pruned 12 feet from the ground. Larger logs were stacked for later transport to a biomass facility, where they will be chipped for landscaping, animal bedding or fuel to generate electricity. The smaller logs, dead saplings and brush were ground into shreds less than four inches in length by a masticator, and the ground is now covered with a layer of compacted mulch two to three inches deep. This mulch is expected to suppress the sprouting of brush for five to 10 years without further maintenance."

The deeper the mulch layer is, the harder it is for the seeds to come up and find sunlight and for brush seeds that get dropped there to find a place to germinate, according to CalAm forester Jan Bray.

While the surface mulch will ignite, McGreevy explained, the "rate of fire spread will be slow and the flame lengths low, thus increasing the chance that first responders will succeed in fire suppression and prevent a catastrophic wildfire."

After masticating, the next form of maintenance would be prescribed burning, according to CalAm grant writer and forester John Heissenbuttel.

Also serving as treasurer for the Amador Fire Safe Council, Heissenbuttel said getting landowners on board with applying prescribed fire as an economical, restorative tool on their properties is a challenge.

"People are scared of fires, and that's one of the things that the Amador Fire Safe Council is working on is helping people understand the benefits of prescribed fire," Heissenbuttel said. "We're working together to educate that it's OK to burn when it's safe. Using fire is so much more cost effective versus the \$2,500 to \$3,500 an acre it costs to masticate it. We want to make grant money stretch as far as possible."

The state has allocated millions of dollars in grant money for fire prevention and forest restoration on private and public lands managed by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

In recent months, Central Fire District water tender operator Terry Stone has been applying for these grants to fund fuel-reduction projects in the Butte Fire scar.

One concern, however, is that 12,058 of the 70,868 acres that burned are administered by the Bureau of Land Management, an agency lacking the internal staff and federal funding to restore these lands, McGreevy said.

"Without local support in grant writing and implementation by our local fire prevention groups, these lands will continue to be a major fire hazard long into the future," McGreevy said.

McGreevy noted that mastication as a restoration method would be effective, yet costly, since it requires heavy equipment with skilled operators and loggers.

Landowners can apply for financial assistance for property-clearing through two cost-sharing programs.

For information about the Natural Resources Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program, visit [bit.ly/2Wc7TVg](http://bit.ly/2Wc7TVg).

For information about the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection California Forest Improvement Program program, visit [bit.ly/2FRTCay](http://bit.ly/2FRTCay).



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