

# Weekly ReCAP for February 15, 2019

Next CPC meeting- March 4, 2019, 1:30 pm. Main Library in San Andreas

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Board of Supervisors Meeting- Feb. 19, 2019 – agenda below:

## REGULAR AGENDA (Single item)

3. [Conduct a study session to provide direction to staff regarding whether to proceed with a cannabis regulatory ordinance and if so, general direction on the content of the ordinance.](#)
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## Important Meeting Notice!

### County seeking feedback on housing issues

- Enterprise report
- Feb 8, 2019

The Calaveras County Planning Department will be hosting a workshop in several locations geared toward improving housing opportunities within the county's updated General Plan.

Within the General Plan, “the Housing Element establishes goals, policies and implementation measures to guide the development of housing in unincorporated Calaveras County. Community input will be used in developing new Housing Element policies and programs and to modify existing policies,” according to the planning department.

“The state is facing a huge housing shortage, and the cost of housing has skyrocketed,” Calaveras County Planning Director Peter Maurer told the Enterprise. “Although we aren't facing the same cost issues here as some areas, we have our own unique problems. We are hoping to hear from people working on housing issues, or that have concerns about housing needs in their communities, so that we can work on finding solutions to those issues here in Calaveras County.”

The schedule for the for the upcoming workshops is as follows:

#### San Andreas

Monday, Feb. 25, 3:00 p.m.

Calaveras County Government Center, Dept. 1 (Old courtroom next to Board chambers) 891 Mountain Ranch Road

#### Murphys

Monday, Feb. 25, 6:00 p.m.

Faith Lutheran Church, Fellowship Hall, 65 Mitchler Ave.

#### Mountain Ranch

Tuesday, Feb. 26, 6:00 p.m.

**Mountain Ranch Community Center, 8049 Washington St.**

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## **Love the Forest Concert**

One of EPFW's most popular events, the annual Love the Forest concert, will be held Saturday March 9 at the Vida Buena Farm 3286 Vallecito Bypass Road in Vallecito. Doors open at 6:30pm, the program featuring Michela Macfarlane and Cantamos begins at 7pm. No host bar, snacks and a raffle.

**Tickets Now available:**

**Tickets are \$20 at the door or \$15 in advance**

**From one of the following outlets:**

**In Angels Camp: Manzanita Arts Emporium; In Arnold: SNAC;**

**In Murphys: Sustenance Books, SNAC & Murphys Music Company**

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## **RCRC- The Barbed Wire- February 8, 2019**

### **Infrastructure Update**

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President Donald Trump mostly omitted infrastructure language from his 2019 State of the Union address to Congress, disappointing policymakers, investors, and local governments who believe the President's support will be critical for the passage of an infrastructure package.

On Thursday, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee held a hearing to discuss the need for drastic investment in America's decaying infrastructure. One of the witnesses, former Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, took notice of the President's declining enthusiasm, and said no infrastructure proposal will make it through Congress without support from President Trump.

House Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon) noted the omission of infrastructure from the speech suggests the President is abandoning a controversial infrastructure proposal he submitted to Congress last year, and does not have a secondary plan in the pipeline.

The Committee hearing, titled "*The Cost of Doing Nothing: Why Investing in Our Nation's Infrastructure Cannot Wait*," was well attended by the California congressional delegation.

Representatives Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach), Doug LaMalfa (R-Butte), Grace Napolitano (D-Los Angeles), and Salud Carbajal (D-Santa Barbara) were present. Their attendance signaled that infrastructure legislation is a priority for their districts. Their engagement on this issue will be critical to ensure the priorities and objectives of rural California are reflected in any infrastructure legislation.

### **Land Water Conservation Fund Reauthorization Advances**

The Senate voted 99-1 to advance the Natural Resources Management Act (S 47), a legislative package that includes a measure to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

The LWCF uses receipts from oil and gas extractions on federal lands to support national parks and federal land management. The Senate vote this week is a procedural step that essentially guarantees

the LWCF will not face major opposition in the Senate on its route to final passage. The Chamber is still debating whether any amendments will be attached, but Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Washington), a co-author of the bill, said she expects a “short process” to a final vote.

Perhaps even better news came from House Natural Resources Chairman Raul Grijalva (D-Arizona) who told reporters this week that he will not propose significant alterations to S 47 after it passes the Senate. Supporters of the bill were concerned Chairman Grijalva would push for more concessions from Republicans on the LWCF language which would compromise the bipartisan agreements that underpinned the Senate bill. It is unclear when the House of Representatives will take up S 47 after it passes the Senate but Chairman Grijalva said he would like to move quickly.

## **BULLETIN BOARD**

*Announcements regarding hearings, grants, and public comment notices of importance to California's rural counties.*

### **USDA Extends Deadlines for New Rural “ReConnect” Broadband Program**

In March 2018, USDA received \$600 million from Congress to expand broadband infrastructure and services in rural America. USDA established the ReConnect Program to help connect rural areas that currently have insufficient broadband service that is available to telecommunications companies, rural electric cooperatives and utilities, internet service providers and municipalities. The program is providing \$200 million in grants, \$200 million for loan and grant combinations, and \$200 million for low-interest loans. In order to give potential applicants sufficient time to access technical assistance from USDA, the deadline has been pushed back to May 31, 2019 or later. Additionally, USDA announced a public webinar with general information about the ReConnect Program on **Wednesday, February 13, 2019 at 11:00 am** Pacific Time/2:00 pm Eastern Time.

Click [here](#) to register for the webinar. Click [here](#) for additional details on the ReConnect program.

### **Rural Business Development Grant Program Updates**

Recently, USDA Rural Development announced a standardized application window for the [Rural Business Development Grant](#) (RBDG) program. Applications are being accepted now through March 29, 2019. Late applications will not be accepted, and all applications must be received **on or before March 29, 2019**.

### **USDA Program Overview & Examples**

USDA encourages those interested in the program to review USDA Rural Development’s [RBDG website](#) for complete program details including eligibility information and priorities. Individual businesses are **not** eligible to apply for this grant program.

Last year, a total of 20 California entities received nearly \$1.2 million in RBDG funds to help support a variety of economic development projects. Here are a few examples:

- City of Dorris received \$30,000 to help develop a strategic economic development plan for the city;
- Indian Dispute Resolution Services received \$49,671 in Native American set-aside funds to provide training and technical assistance in micro-enterprise and small business skills development to entrepreneurs living on reservations;
- CSU, Chico Research Foundation received \$50,000 for a study on the barriers to deploying broadband in rural areas including what hampers growth of wireless service providers, precision

agricultural technology companies, and technical STEM training, and what is needed to support these high skill, high wage jobs;

- Imperial Regional Alliance received \$80,000 to facilitate private investment and promote local economic development growth in addition to developing a cold storage facility near Calexico to help alleviate local economic development issues;
- Lake County Economic Development Corporation received \$92,000 to support small and emerging businesses in Lake County with direct technical assistance through workshops, one-on-one consultations and development of marketing and businesses skills;
- California Association for Local Economic Development (CALED) received \$125,000 to create a partnership to finance rural infrastructure and technical assistance to support increased economic development and job creation across rural California;
- Central Sierra Planning Council received \$178,000 for a multi-prong approach that includes long-term business strategic planning, business plan development, community economic development and a feasibility study evaluating the use of local biomass products to reduce wildfire risk and support affordable housing construction.

For questions on the program, how to apply, or a proposed project, please contact one of the following Rural Development team members:

Maretta Siatunuu, 530-792-5801 or [Maretta.Siatunuu@ca.usda.gov](mailto:Maretta.Siatunuu@ca.usda.gov)

Karen Rich, 530-792-5825 or [Karen.Rich@ca.usda.gov](mailto:Karen.Rich@ca.usda.gov)

Carol Pranka, 530-574-7410 or [Carol.Pranka@ca.usda.gov](mailto:Carol.Pranka@ca.usda.gov)

Dan Johnson, 661-336-0967 or [Daniel.Johnson@ca.usda.gov](mailto:Daniel.Johnson@ca.usda.gov)

John Jebian, 760-238-6525 or [John.Jebian@ca.usda.gov](mailto:John.Jebian@ca.usda.gov)

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## Tuolumne Supervisors To Hear Update On Biomass Facility

[02/11/2019 10:16 am PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

Sonora, CA — Part of the \$70-million federal resiliency grant funding awarded following the Rim Fire will go to create a biomass facility.

The region was picked to receive National Disaster Resiliency Competition funding in 2016, with \$22-million going to biomass efforts, \$28-million for forest and watershed improvements, and \$19-million for Community Resilience Centers.

California's Sierra Nevada Conservancy has been selected to oversee the biomass facility aspect. On Tuesday, consultants Roy Anderson of the Beck Group and Bill Carlson of Carlson Small Power Consultants will present the final results of a feasibility study regarding the project, and Elliott Vander Kolk from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy will talk about the next steps moving forward.

Also on Tuesday, there will be a presentation recapping the supervisors workshop held January 23-25 at the Rush Creek Lodge in the Groveland area.

Tuesday's meeting starts at 9am in the supervisors meeting room in downtown Sonora.

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## Renting in Mother Lode proves difficult for many

## **By Dakota Morlan / The Calaveras Enterprise / February 7, 2019**

For those looking to rent in the Mother Lode, especially at an affordable price, finding a place may seem close to impossible.

There are less than 10 rental units currently available in Calaveras County, which is the norm, according to Property Manager for Century 21 Wildwood Properties Alison Daniels.

“We have so many inquiries on a daily basis,” Daniels told the Enterprise. “The phone rings all day long, every day. The majority are looking in the \$1,200 range, and we don't have any options for them.”

Daniels and other property managers in the area have experienced so much demand that they've had to abandon their customer database systems and show homes in groups, with most rental units flying off the market within days of being listed.

Out of the six rentals Daniels manages in Calaveras County, only one is vacant – a three-bedroom, two-bathroom home in Arnold with a steep driveway for \$1,200 per month. According to Daniels, houses become cheaper above the snowline where transportation is an issue.

In more desirable areas like Greenhorn Creek in Angels Camp, a three-bedroom can cost well above \$1,800. In Murphys, a “charming” two-bedroom loft may cost over \$1,900.

“For a run-of-the-mill house, you're looking at about \$1,650,” Daniels said.

Shannon Kent, Realtor and owner of Step Up Property Management in Calaveras and Tuolumne, said the average price of a two-bedroom in either county is in the \$1,000 to \$1,100 range.

That price is significantly lower than in many cities in California, with San Francisco the priciest at a median of \$4,730 for a two-bedroom in 2016, according to Apartment List. A similar unit in Anaheim costs \$1,740, and in Bakersfield, it's \$840. However, all three cities were listed within the top 10 most expensive statewide.

“We have a lot of people looking, and the availability out there is really slim, which pushes prices up,” said Century 21 Sierra Properties Office Manager Jesse Gibbs regarding Calaveras County. “We have a great need for more rentals.”

For a single person earning minimum wage, the options are even slimmer.

“It is kind of crazy, I think, that rooms for rent are becoming much more popular because people can't afford to live by themselves,” said Kandi Thompson, broker and owner of Divine Properties, which serves Amador County and other parts of the Mother Lode.

“We have absolutely no availability for apartments,” Daniels confirmed.

According to Kelli Coane, director at the Resource Connection, those hoping to get into a unit in an apartment complex may have to spend six months or more on an extensive waiting list.

And it seems the competitive nature of the market has created an ideal climate for scammers.

“There's always people who take advantage. For some, they don't think of it that way – they're providing the place for someone to live,” said Coane, who encountered one woman who was paying \$300 per month to live in a camper shell supported on cinder blocks.

Thompson added that those desperate to find a home often fall victim to online scams – particularly on Craigslist, a web-based classified listing. Scammers post listed homes on the site, at extremely low prices, asking the renter to send a check, sight unseen.

“I've had people thinking they were on the phone with the owner trying to climb through a tenant's window,” she said. “It's really, really bad. I've had people move in, starting to deliver stuff to one of our homes without ever having talked to us.”

Thompson warns renters that it should be a red flag if owners refuse to show their property or claim they live outside of the area.

### **A 'perfect storm'**

The Butte Fire in 2015, which destroyed 549 homes in Amador and Calaveras Counties, is often cited when discussing the rent crisis in the Mother Lode, in addition to the Camp Fire in late November, which has sent an unknown number of families looking for housing in the area.

However, Thompson observed an increased shortage in rentals roughly a year before the Butte Fire when the housing market began to recover from the recession. Homeowners who had been looking to sell for years but were instead forced to rent were finally able to put their units on the market, and many renters had their homes sold from underneath them.

Displaced families were an added burden to the already strained availability, she said.

Daniels agreed that fire victims, fire recovery and tree mortality workers arriving in the area created more competition, as her usual clientele is families with kids and new hires. Most of the temporary workers have since left, opening up spaces, she said, though it hasn't been enough to keep renters at bay.

Thompson said that Divine Properties experienced an increase in calls from owners wanting to rent out their units about three months ago, when the rental market in Amador went into a "standstill."

"It's probably the same in Calaveras," she said. "It's still not a ton compared to what has been lost."

## **No quick fix**

"Affordable housing is one of our greatest obstacles. Not just for low-income people but for working people as well," Calaveras County District 2 Supervisor Jack Garamendi told the Enterprise. "It's a challenge across rural America, and we're taking it on through our statewide organizations."

Garamendi added that he believes the problem is "acute" within his district, which encompasses Mokelumne Hill, West Point and Mountain Ranch, due to the aftermath of the Butte Fire.

"I wish I had a solution," he said. "One of the challenges is the cost of construction paired with limited incomes in our community. Until those lines intersect, we won't get increased inventory."

Calaveras County Planning Director Peter Maurer echoed the sentiment that it doesn't "pencil out" financially for developers to build affordable housing units in the area, though the planning commission tried to provide sufficient land for housing options in the new general plan, which has yet to be released. The commission will also be looking into vacation rentals and how they affect the market for residents, he added.

"It's really not the county's role in constructing housing, but rather try to provide incentives for (the) building industry to create a range of housing," Maurer said. "(The problem) is exacerbated in rural areas where cost of construction is high compared to rent or sales price."

According to Maurer, there have been no recent developments within the county geared toward affordable housing.

Another issue that may be keeping availability low is the lack of lucrativity for homeowners when it comes to renting out a unit.

"A misconception with renters is that landlords jack up the rent all the time," Daniels said. "A lot of the time, they don't make their mortgage..... The market has been down the last six months. We've seen price reductions."

"Tenant-landlord laws are crazier in California than anywhere else in the country," said Thompson, who as a broker is all too familiar with the 47-page rental agreements both parties are required to complete. "The laws deter owners from even renting out their properties – the laws are made for tenants, not owners."

Thompson added that landlords who are not well-versed in law could be in for a "very expensive lesson" if a situation with a tennant goes south.

## Finding a place

Despite all the difficulties a renter may experience during the home search, there are still a select few who are working to make the process less discouraging.

Owners of Big Horn Mobile Home Park in Angels Camp, Steve and Angela Wagner, and currently in the process of adding eight new single-wide mobile homes to their facility, available for rent or rent-to-own in the spring.

“We know there's a rental crisis going on here, so we thought what a better way to help the community and upgrade our park?” Angela Wagner told the Enterprise.

Another helpful hand was offered at Big Horn when a mobile home owner agreed to rent out their unit to a couple who lost their home in Paradise.

“It's been a blessing for us. (The process) went really smoothly and quickly,” said Christine Mulgrew, who hopes to plant roots in Calaveras with her husband, Patrick. “We were looking around but didn't find anything until my in-laws found this place.”

Meanwhile, local property managers are developing new ways to connect renters with available homes and offering insider tips to make the overall process easier.

Thompson started a Facebook page in recent years called Amador/Calaveras Rentals – a “one-stop shop” for property managers, owners and people looking to rent.

“A lot of property managers make it their sole source of advertising,” Thompson said. “You can rent out a property there within a day.”

Other tips offered by Daniels are to check local property management websites for listings rather than bigger sites like Trulia. The local sites are more up-to-date, she said.

Daniels also recommends calling your local property managers on a weekly basis.

Regarding financial assistance, there are resources available for low-income individuals – particularly those who have been affected by crimes like domestic violence.

Over the past two years, the Resource Connection's Rapid Rehousing Program provided rental assistance for over 20 qualifying individuals and families. Coane said a single person earning minimum wage would qualify for the program, but the issue was finding a place to rent once the individual was accepted.

The Rapid Rehousing grant expired in December, but Coane said the Resource Connection has been approved for another \$200,000 federal grant that should be available early next year.

“It's a substantial amount of money we can use to help people with deposits or rental assistance,” Coane said. “Ideally, we want to find a couple units we can rent and move people in and out.”

In the meantime, Coane recommends reaching out to the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency and Sierra HOPE for other potential grant opportunities.

The Calaveras County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) also administers housing assistance programs, particularly through CalWORKs, which “helps eligible families become self-supervisors Very Concerned About Biomass Project Timeline -supporting through temporary cash aid.”

The agency offers support specific to mentally ill individuals through Full Service Partnership Housing.

Calaveras County HHSA Director Kristen Brinks told the Enterprise, “The difficulty continues to be identifying units that are affordable for clients long term.”

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## Supervisors Very Concerned About Biomass Project Timeline

[02/13/2019 10:16 am PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

Sonora, CA — Part of a \$70-million federal resiliency grant awarded to the region following the Rim Fire is \$22-million to construct a biomass facility.

However, there are growing concerns about whether it will meet federally set timelines.

Yesterday the board heard an update about efforts to develop the project being overseen by the state's Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and the tentative plan is to allow 4-5 businesses to share the site. It could create 50 full-time jobs, as well as 100-150 indirect jobs.

Companies would have to submit proposals, and they would also have to bring funding to the table, with the overall project expected to cost around \$40-million. The businesses would likely focus on small scale biomass power, a small scale sawmill, post and pole manufacturing and firewood bundling.

Two potential sites have been identified, one along Camage Road, and another in the Chinese Camp area. It was noted that 7-10 acres is the ideal property size. The Camage Avenue site is only about five acres, which is of concern, but the Chinese Camp location would be a further distance from the biomass source, creating an increase in costs for transportation.

The facility must be in operation and grant expenditures spent by 2022. A big concern is that if a lawsuit is filed, it could delay construction. There are also questions about the impact of PG&E's bankruptcy.

Supervisor Sherri Brenann initially voiced concerns about meeting the deadline. Board member Anaiah Kirk also chimed in, and noted that there are two mills already in place in the county, so he questioned whether there are other ways to spend the \$22-million to make the community more fire safe.

Board Chair Karl Rodefer, speaking to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy officials, and project consultants, concluded, "I have never in my life seen anything take so much time to get so little distance down the road...Dealing with HUD has been extremely painful...The message that you delivered today is a good start in a new direction."

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy has agreed to provide quarterly updates on the efforts to meet the upcoming deadlines.

Rodefer added, "I don't want anyone to think we are ungrateful for this, but we are not going to be very grateful if we can't execute it."

Rodefer acknowledged that if the project can meet deadlines, it could provide an economic boom, but if not, it will be two years of wasted efforts.

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## Clean Break?

### Community, agencies divided on fuelbreak proposal

- [Enterprise report by Davis Harper](#)
- Feb 13, 2019 Updated Feb 13, 2019

A plan for a Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) logging operation adjacent to Calaveras Big Trees State Park along the Highway 4 corridor has raised opposing viewpoints among local homeowners, environmental groups and foresters.

The 740-acre project includes 26 acres of designated special treatment area (any zone within 200 feet of a state park boundary) adjacent to Calaveras Big Trees State Park and 433 acres of fuelbreak, in



addition to 241 acres of alternative prescription and 38 acres of selection, according to a timber harvest plan (THP) filed Jan. 14 with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

A fuelbreak refers to the carefully planned thinning of dense fire-prone vegetation in a forest setting to reduce the chances of a fire spreading from the ground into the overhead tree canopy, according to a [Cal Fire web page](#). It's designed to ease fire suppression efforts in the event of a wildfire. A "fuelbreak" prescription under state law requires a logging operation to leave enough scattered conifers uncut to total an average of 50 square feet of basal area per acre, according to John Buckley, the executive director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC), a Twain Harte-based environmental nonprofit. Under hot summer conditions, shade from the retained trees can lower temperatures and provide scenic benefit, as opposed to a logging prescription that removes nearly all trees, Buckley added.

SPI owns 74,000 acres of forestland in Calaveras County.

With the goal of protecting about 2,000 homes in the Big Trees Village (BTV) subdivision – directly east of Camp Connell – from a potential wildfire moving up the north slope of the North Fork Stanislaus River Canyon, the company's plan proposes to implement a 300-foot wide section of fuelbreak along an approximately 4.5-mile boundary line between residential and SPI property. The prescription aims to reduce surface and ladder fuels, mitigate potential threats of crown fires, and subsequently regulate fire behavior by keeping it on the ground, allowing more time for suppression efforts, as the THP describes.

This project would connect to other proposed fuelbreak areas on the south side of the canyon under the Sour Boards THP.

SPI Community Relations Manager Mark Luster said that the fuelbreak has had overwhelming support after several community meetings, and that he anticipates that many residents will be grateful for the work.

"This is a great project, and I think it's really going to benefit to the community," Luster said. "We're looking forward to getting started."

After removal, trees will either be converted into lumber products, biomass to be sent to a cogeneration plant or mulch to be spread on-site, Luster said.

### **Community input**

While District 3 Supervisor Merita Callaway was reluctant to comment on the Village THP as a whole, she said that firebreaks are critical to Ebbetts Pass neighborhoods.

"With a 433-acre fuelbreak, that will have an impact on adjacent properties where owners are used to the forest view," Callaway said.

Additionally, Callaway said she hopes that SPI "leaves some of the hardwood trees to soften the impact," and to help protect wildlife habitats.

Big Trees Village homeowner Steve Lauterbach said he is appreciative of the proposed fuelbreak, despite the change in scenery.

Lauterbach said he loved the "look of the forest" when he bought a cabin in the subdivision in 1995, but later learned that the forest was overstocked with disease- and fire-prone vegetation.

"We couldn't see more than 40 or 50 feet into the dense canopy around our cabin, and we liked that appearance," Lauterbach said. "Since then we learned that this century-long fire-suppressed forest is unnatural and prone to disease and devastating crown fires. Because Big Trees Village is so vulnerable to a devastating fire, we are deeply appreciative that SPI is planning a fuelbreak around our wonderful

community. When (not if) the wildfire comes up the North Fork Canyon, Cal Fire will have a defensible perimeter from which to fight the oncoming fire. Big Trees Village could never afford to establish this firebreak, and my wife and I thank SPI for doing so.”

Cal Fire sent out letters to homeowners within 300 feet of the project area to inform them of SPI’s application for the operation, according to a Jan. 21 Big Trees Village Facebook post.

A former Big Trees Village Homeowners Association board member himself, Lauterbach said he understands that fire safety continues to be an active concern of the board.

Additionally, Lauterbach emphasized his respect for those with “thoughtful concerns about elements of the plan.”

While many community members are in favor of the project given the promise of fire protection, local environmental groups have expressed concerns about impacts on wildlife, water quality and scenery, among others.

“Seldom does any commercial THP have the potential to significantly affect so many families occupying residential properties directly adjacent to timber operations,” reads a comment on the THP submitted Feb. 4 by CSERC. “There are many families (who have had well-forested SPI acres adjacent to their yards and residences for decades) who will have their long-established viewshed, adjacent property, and sense of place suddenly transformed by the logging, bulldozing, and the application of herbicide treatments.”

Citing potential impacts on water quality, wildlife and sensitive plant species, CSERC criticized the plan’s lack of clarity in explaining whether “herbicides will be used, and if so, over how great an area the treatments will occur, and in what quantities.”

Amid a multitude of criticisms, the center voiced support for the fuelbreak prescription, calling it “vastly preferable to an even-age treatment such as alternative or clear-cut logging treatments.”

“In general, despite it being a measurable impact on adjacent property owners, the 400-plus acres of fuelbreak will still be leaving lots of green trees, habitat for wildlife and a safer condition if a wildfire should burn into that area,” Buckley told the Enterprise in a phone interview. That said, “Our center consistently urges SPI to soften the treatments on their even-age logging units that will be scattered along Highway 4 and other areas farther away from homes and residential areas. Those treatments will be similar to clear-cuts and will not be leaving large- or medium-sized trees, forest habitat and other benefits for wildlife, but they will be consistent with state forest requirements and are within the rights of SPI.”

Paul Rousseau and Marie Nathalie Beaudoin, neighboring Camp Connell cabin owners, requested in a Jan. 25 comment that SPI refrain from cutting the “very few remaining trees at the end of our property and clean up the large amount of debris left from previous cutting.”

“It is our experience this logging makes things much worse,” the comment reads. “Sure they thin out a few trees here and there, but they leave an incredible mess behind. The branches limbed from the trees are left on the forest floor. And if the tree breaks during its fall, which happened at the bottom of our land, the entire trunk is left there. The result is that the forest floor is now littered with wood debris, which creates a much worse fire hazard than what was there before. We really don’t understand the need to harvest this area yet again, after just a couple of years.”

The pre-harvest inspection date for the Village THP will be scheduled once weather conditions permit a walk-through of the harvesting area, Luster said. If permitted by Cal Fire, the work is planned to start

sometime this summer.

### **The statewide context**

According to Luster, the forestry industry has “always been focused on fuelbreaks,” but they’ve become more of a “household conversation” in recent years due to the increased scale and magnitude of wildland fires across the state.

That said, fire ecologists and environmental leaders argue that a crucial component to the conversation is not being addressed – homes built in wildfire-prone regions are ill-equipped to survive catastrophic wind-driven fires, even with fuelbreaks in place.

“We have a home-ignition problem,” said Richard Halsey, director of the Chaparral Institute, a Southern California-based environmental advocacy group, in a Jan. 16 legislative staff briefing co-hosted by Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch and Sierra Club California. “The focus has been in the wrong place.”

In fact, “The majority of California’s most devastating wildfires (as per Cal Fire’s official list) have not involved forests,” according to a figure included in a Jan. 11 letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom co-signed by Halsey and other fire ecologists and environmental leaders across the state. In response to Newsom’s proposals to allocate hundreds of millions of dollars to forest management and fuel reduction projects, the 27-page letter urges Newsom to shift the focus toward fireproofing homes.

Another speaker at the briefing, Forest and Fire Ecologist Dr. Chad Hanson, warned that wildfire prevention strategies centered around fuels reduction are ineffective in suppressing wind-driven fires, since these projects often change forest to grassland, removing large trees that act as a wind buffer and leaving behind “slash debris and kindling cheat grass” through which fires burn more rapidly.

Additionally, Hanson argued that based on an analysis of 1,500 fires over the course of three decades, the fastest-spreading and hottest-burning fires have occurred in heavily logged or commercially thinned areas.

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