

Weekly ReCAP for March 29, 2019

Next CPC meeting April 1, 2019, 1:30 pm, Chesebrough Room, Main Library, San Andreas

Repeat of an important message:

Director Maurer announced the Draft Housing Element would be posted today (March 15) and then public comment period begins. Public comments on the Draft Housing Element are due by May 14. Peter will be sending the HE to HCD on April 1 for a 60 day review, then the HE will come back for adoption hearings, probably in July. The Public Review Draft Housing Element is now posted. The link is at the bottom of [Housing Element](#) page: <https://planning.calaverasgov.us/Gen-Plan-Zoning/Housing-Element>

Sierra Nevada Film Festival

Saturday, March 30, 2019, Black Bart Playhouse, 580 S. Algiers Rd., Murphys

www.sierrsfilmfest.org

info@sierrafilmfest.org

April 20, 2019–The Calaveras Holistic Health Fair 2019 will be held on Saturday, April 20th from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Mountain Ranch Community Park in Mountain Ranch.

Millions Flagged To Repair Two Area Highways

[03/21/2019 5:02 pm PST](#)

Tracey Petersen, MML News Reporter

Sonora, CA – State transportation officials have released more than \$758 million for 91 highway projects – including two in area counties.

Out of that money, the California Transportation Commission is allocating \$90.4 million in SB 1, the 12 cent per gallon gas tax passed by lawmakers in 2017, funds for 26 fix-it-first projects.

“While we are thankful for the rain, our crews worked around the clock this winter responding to the harsh weather conditions that took a toll on our roadways and culverts,” said Caltrans Director Laurie Berman. “The funds from SB 1 allow us now to proactively maintain our bridges, repair our roadways, and ensure our drainage systems can handle the winters ahead.”

With the funds, Caltrans crews will improve 21 bridges and 189 miles of pavement, upgrade 292 devices to reduce congestion, and repair or replace 81 culverts to prevent flooding on highways. Alpine and Mariposa counties have been flagged to receive a total of nearly \$5 million. Below is a breakdown

of that funding provided by Caltrans:

Bridge Replacement and Upgrade Project in Alpine County: This estimated \$9.3 million project will replace and upgrade bridge rails at the Silver Creek Bridge on SR-4, the West Fork Carson River Bridge on SR-88 and the Markleeville Creek Bridge on SR89. The project was allocated approximately \$1.9 million.

Drainage Project Along State Route 41 in Mariposa County: This estimated \$4.3 million project will repair or replace culverts (underground drainage systems) in 19 locations on SR-41 from the town of Fish Camp to south of the Yosemite National Park boundary. The project was allocated approximately \$3 million.

Caltrans notes that since SB 1 was enacted, crews have repaired or replaced 89 bridges and paved more than 1,300 lane miles on highways throughout the state.

RCRC – The Barbed Wire – March 22, 2019

Governor Newsom Issues Executive Order to Fast-Track Tree Clearing and Forest Management Work

Earlier today, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a statewide emergency to speed up fire prevention efforts. The Governor announced providing \$24 million in six fire-prone counties to assist community-based organizations in spreading the word about wildfire threat, and grants for groups that help pets and farm animals during disasters. Another \$12 million will fund local and regional response teams, and \$13 million will finance a public awareness campaign.

“The increasing wildfire risks we face as a state mean we simply can’t wait until a fire starts in order to start deploying emergency resources,” Newsom said in a statement. “California needs sustained focus and immediate action in order to better protect our communities.”

Governor Newsom’s Executive Order addresses more than 2 million rural California homes, most of which are in high fire hazard zones. The Executive Order also suspends CEQA requirements for 35 immediate projects identified earlier this month in CAL FIRE’s 45-Day Report, which include fuel breaks, fire access roads, and fuels reduction projects in areas across the state, including many in RCRC member counties. CAL FIRE is already engaging local governments in beginning work on these projects. Details on all 35 projects may be accessed [here](#).

RCRC Files Key Documents at the CPUC on Issues Impacting Rural Counties

Following a unanimous vote last week by RCRC’s Board of Directors to initiate the action, On Monday, RCRC staff submitted motions for party status for two key California Public Utility Commission (CPUC) Proceedings – De-Energization and Senate Bill 901 (Dodd) Wildfire Mitigation Plans. The CPUC is undertaking both actions in response to catastrophic wildfire events that have been directly linked to power lines and other utility equipment, most notably the 2017 Thomas Fire, and many of the fires in the Northern California wine country in 2017.

SB 901, which was passed into law last year, mandated the development of wildfire mitigation plans by investor-owned utilities, while CPUC has initiated the development of official de-energization procedures for prevention of wildfires during hazardous weather conditions.

RCRC will be participating in both proceedings to provide a rural perspective on the catastrophic wildfires and ensure utilities have comprehensive plans for public power shut-offs and reduced wildfire

ignitions through proper vegetation management and fire hardening protocols. It is imperative that the CPUC develop utility rules that meet community needs in rural fire-prone areas. The CPUC has targeted the end of April 2019 to have a proposed decision in the De-Energization Proceeding regarding notice and communications issues, and in May 2019 for approval of utility Wildfire Mitigation Plans.

Cannabis Banking Update

On Tuesday, House Financial Services Committee Chair Maxine Waters (D-Los Angeles) announced the Committee will hold a markup for HR 1595, the SAFE Banking Act, on March 26, 2019. The SAFE Banking Act would lift the federal prohibition on cannabis banking, and allow banks to provide financial services to cannabis-related businesses.

HR 1595 has 138 cosponsors and support from Representative Waters. HR 1595 is expected to pass out of the Committee, and the original cosponsors believe the bill could reach the House floor by summer. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) is expected to introduce a Senate version of the bill later this year. The path forward in the Senate is unclear for cannabis banking. A companion version of the SAFE Banking Act should have support among Republicans who represent states where cannabis has been legalized but it is uncertain whether Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) would allow the bill to reach the Senate floor.

Central Valley Water Update

The Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) responded last week to inquiries placed by Representative Jim Costa (D-Fresno) and Representative TJ Cox (D-Kings) regarding water allocation for the Central Valley Project. Congressmen Costa and Cox co-authored a letter to the USBR in February 2019 requesting an increase in water allocations for the Central Valley Project, citing increased levels of precipitation in recent weeks.

In response, the USBR announced the allocation for North of the Delta, in-Delta, and American River contractors would increase to 100 percent, South-of-Delta agricultural water service contractors would increase to 55 percent, and South-of-Delta municipal and industrial contractors would increase to 80 percent. The USBR reports the added allocations reflect increased rainfall from February 2019 and early March 2019. In a statement, Congressman Cox praised the USBR for increasing the allocations and taking “a step in the right direction.” Congressman Costa was disappointed in the allocation levels and promised to inquire further why the USBR is not allocating more water to the Central Valley, given the historic levels of rainfall for the region.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

RCRC members are encouraged to share letters addressed to state and federal representatives and regulatory bodies with RCRC's Government Affairs staff. Click “Read More” to access information related to the current status of legislation impacting California's rural counties.

Assembly Bill 41 (Gallagher): Disaster Relief: Camp Fire. Assembly Bill 41 provides that the State share for disaster relief is born by the State as it relates to the Camp Fire that started in November 2018 in Butte County. **Status:** AB 41 awaits consideration in the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee. **RCRC Status:** Support

Assembly Bill 217 (Garcia, E.): Safe and Affordable Drinking Water. Assembly Bill 217 establishes the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund in the State Treasury and provides that moneys in the fund are available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to the State Water Resources Control Board

to provide a stable source of funding to secure access to safe drinking water for all Californians, while also ensuring the long-term sustainability of drinking water service and infrastructure. **Status:** AB 217 awaits consideration in the Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee. **RCRC Position:** Pending

Assembly Bill 247 (Dahle): Disaster Relief: Carr and Klamathon Fires. Assembly Bill 247 provides that the state share for disaster project allocations to local agencies is up to 100% of total state eligible costs connected with the Klamathon fire that started on July 5, 2018, in the County of Siskiyou, and the Carr fire that started on July 23, 2018, in the County of Shasta. **Status:** AB 247 awaits consideration in the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee. **RCRC Status:** Support

Assembly Bill 293 (Dodd): California Wildfire Warning Center: Weather Monitoring. Assembly Bill 293 would establish the California Wildfire Warning Center, a statewide network of automated weather and environmental monitoring stations conducting fire weather forecasting and threat assessment to aid in wildfire prevention and response. Comprises the center of representatives from the Public Utilities Commission, the Office of Emergency Services, and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. **Status:** AB 293 awaits consideration in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Assembly Bill 297 (Gallagher): Emergency Average Daily Attendance. Assembly Bill 297 would require the Superintendent of Public Instruction to extend the period during which it is essential to alleviate continued reductions in average daily attendance attributable to a state of emergency declared by the Governor in November 2018, for a school district where no less than five percent of the residences within the school district or district facilities were destroyed by the qualifying emergency. **Status:** AB 297 awaits consideration in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. **RCRC Status:** Support

Assembly Bill 343 (Patterson) Forestry: Biomass Energy. Assembly Bill 343 would require the California Natural Resources Agency to create and implement a program to offset the costs of transporting fuels to a biomass energy facility. **Status:** AB 343 awaits consideration in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. **RCRC Status:** Support

Assembly Bill 394 (Oberholte): California Environmental Quality Act: Exemption: Fire Safety. Assembly Bill 394 expedites fire safety improvements for subdivisions that are at significant fire risk and lack a secondary escape route. **Status:** AB 394 awaits consideration in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Assembly Bill 616 (Patterson) California Forest Carbon Plan: Report. Assembly Bill 616 would require the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, in collaboration with the Natural Resources Agency and California Environmental Protection Agency, to prepare and submit to the Legislature and appropriate legislative policy and budget committees, on or before January 1, 2021, and by January 1 of each year thereafter, until January 1, 2025, a report on the progress made and policies and resources needed to achieve specified wildland fire prevention goals for fuel treatment and vegetation management. **Status:** AB 616 awaits consideration in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Assembly Bill 883 (Dahle) Fish and Wildlife: Catastrophic Wildfires: Report. Assembly Bill 883 would require the Department of Fish and Wildlife, in consultation with Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, on or before a certain date, and by certain day of each year and thereafter, to study, investigate, and report to the Legislature on the impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat resulting from any catastrophic wildfire that occurred during that calendar year. **Status:** AB 883 awaits consideration in the Assembly Water, Parks & Wildlife Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Assembly Bill 1080/SB 54 (Gonzalez): Circular Economy and Plastic Pollution Reduction. AB 1080 would establish the California Circular Economy and Plastic Pollution Reduction Act, which would require the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery to adopt regulations to source reduce and recycle 75 percent of single use packaging and products sold or distributed in California by 2030. **Status:** AB 1080 awaits consideration in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. **RCRC Status:** Support if Amended

Assembly Bill 1111 (Friedman): Office of Sustainable Outdoor Recreation. Assembly Bill 1111 would establish the Office of Sustainable Outdoor Recreation in state government. Requires the office to undertake certain activities, including supporting the outdoor recreation economy of the state by engaging in specified activities. Requires the office to create an advisory committee to provide advice, expertise, support, and service to the office. Authorizes the office to receive the assistance and funds from public and private sources. **Status:** AB 1111 awaits consideration in the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Assembly Bill 1375 (Bigelow): Disaster Relief: Dead and Dying Tree Removal. Assembly Bill 1375 would provide that the state share for removal of dead and dying trees in connection with the Governor's Proclamation of a State of Emergency issued on October 30, 2015, is not more than a certain percentage of total eligible costs. **Status:** AB 1375 awaits consideration in the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Assembly Bill 1530 (Cooley): Unauthorized Cannabis Activity Reduction Grants. Assembly Bill 1530 would require the Board of State and Community Corrections to create and administer a program of grants to be made on a competitive basis to cities, counties and joint powers authorities to establish or expand an enforcement program against unauthorized cannabis activity. Provides consumer education about the difference between licensed or legal cannabis activity and unlicensed or illegal cannabis activity. **Status:** AB 1530 awaits consideration in the Assembly Business and Professions Committee. **RCRC Status:** Support

Senate Bill 19 (Dodd): Water Resources: Stream Gages. Senate Bill 19 requires the California Department of Water Resources to develop a plan to deploy a network of stream gages that includes a determination of new needs as well as opportunities for reactivating existing gages. **Status:** SB 19 awaits consideration in the Senate Appropriations Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Senate Bill 45 (Allen): Wildfire, Drought, and Flood Protection Bond Act 2020. Senate Bill 45 enacts the Wildfire, Drought, and Flood Protection Bond Act of 2020, which, if approved by voters, authorizes the issuance of bonds to finance projects to restore fire damaged areas, reduce wildfire risk, create healthy forests and watersheds, reduce climate impacts on urban areas and vulnerable populations, protect water supply and water quality, protect rivers, lakes and streams, reduce flood risk, protect fish and wildlife from climate impacts, and protect coastal lands and resources. **Status:** SB 45 awaits consideration in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee. **RCRC Status:** Pending

Senate Bill 62 (Dodd): Endangered Species: Accidental Take. Senate Bill 62 would make permanent an "accidental take" of candidate, threatened, or endangered species resulting from acts that occur on a farm or a ranch in the course of otherwise lawful routine. **Status:** SB 62 awaits consideration in the Senate Appropriations Committee. **RCRC Status:** Support

Senate Bill 67 (McGuire): Cannabis: Temporary and Provisional Licenses. Senate Bill 67 would extend the time-period for which a temporary license is valid when issued by state cannabis licensing entities, and would ease the process for cannabis operators to obtain a provisional cannabis license as a step toward full licensure. **Status:** SB 67 awaits consideration in the Senate Appropriations Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Senate Bill 190 (Dodd): Fire Safety: Building Standards. Senate Bill 190 creates a model defensible space program for local governments and requires the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to provide training resources for local building officials, builders, and fire service personnel to improve building fire safety standards. **Status:** SB 190 awaits consideration in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Senate Bill 200 (Monning): Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund. Senate Bill 200 establishes the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund in the State Treasury and provides that moneys in the fund are available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to the State Water Resources Control Board to provide a stable source of funding to secure access to safe drinking water for all Californians, while also ensuring the long-term sustainability of drinking water service and infrastructure. **Status:** SB 200 awaits consideration in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee. **RCRC Status:** Pending

Senate Bill 209 (Dodd): California Wildfire Warning Center: Weather Monitoring. Senate Bill 209 would establish the California Wildfire Warning Center, a statewide network of automated weather and environmental monitoring stations conducting fire weather forecasting and threat assessment to aid in wildfire prevention and response. Comprises the center of representatives from the Public Utilities Commission, the Office of Emergency Services, and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. **Status:** SB 209 awaits consideration in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

Senate Bill 414 (Caballero): Small Systems Water Authority Act of 2019. Senate Bill 414 creates the Small System Water Authority Act of 2019 and states legislative findings and declarations relating to authorizing the creation of small system water authorities that will have powers to absorb, improve, and competently operate noncompliant public water systems. **Status:** SB 414 awaits consideration in the Senate Governance and Finance Committee. **RCRC Status:** Support

Senate Bill 462 (Stern): Community Colleges: Forestland Restoration Workforce. Senate Bill 462 would Require the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges, working in collaboration with the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, to establish a model curriculum for a forestland restoration workforce program that could be offered at campuses of the California Community Colleges. **Status:** SB 462 awaits consideration in the Senate Education Committee. **RCRC Position:** Support

A Taxing Discussion On Boosting Tuolumne County Revenues

[03/22/2019 8:20 pm PST](#)

Tracey Petersen, MML News Reporter

Tuolumne, CA – Tuolumne County Supervisors held a think tank of sorts today, discussing the rising cost of services and how to raise the revenue base to pay for them.

All five supervisors were on hand at a meeting at the Black Oak Casino Executive Board Room in Tuolumne to tackle that issue. Board Chair and District 5 Supervisor Karl Rodefer tells Clarke Broadcasting, “Costs are going up for the county and it is above the revenue (coming in).”

Although no hard figures were nailed down, Rodefer relays, the board looked at possible options to generate more revenue through ways like increasing sales and transient occupancy (TOT) taxes, imposing visitor type fees, requiring a business to be licensed or a property assessment fee.

In a united front, representatives from the county fire department and independent departments voiced

their concerns to the board regarding aging equipment, response times, staff shortages and a wide coverage area. That is where the idea of a property assessment comes into play. Rodefer notes that the board is conscious of increasing the financial burden of citizens, but says the reality is that citizens are asking for additional services like more fire protection or road repairs. “The questions that I always ask,” says Rodefer, “You want us to do more on roads and on fire safety but don’t want to pay more. So, what services are you willing to give up to do that?”

No vote was taken at today’s meeting. Instead staff was asked to study the issues and come back with recommendations. Rodefer stressed, “This is the start of a planning process to address a long term process. So we’re not going to come out next month with a ballot or special election to rob everybody’s piggy bank.” He shares that a lot of these options could fall by the wayside, and that they may not be viable or services could be cut. Rodefer adds, “What I don’t want is for people to get really excited, ‘Oh my gosh, I don’t want to pay any more taxes.’ What we’re really doing is looking at the fiscal problem and trying to figure out what the best solution to it would be.”

Calaveras County Selects Potential New CAO

[03/27/2019 8:02 am PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

San Andreas, CA — During a closed session yesterday the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors voted to extend an “offer of appointment” to one of the candidates seeking to be the next County Administrative Officer.

Board Clerk Diane Severud announced afterwards, “The board voted unanimously to direct staff to extend an offer of appointment to a successful candidate. If accepted, and after completion of a background check, the name will be released, and staff will bring forward a contract, and resolution, memorializing the appointment.”

The motion to hire the unidentified individual was made by Supervisor Benjamin Stopper and seconded by Gary Tofanelli. It is the second person that has been offered the position. Outgoing CAO Tim Lutz departed in December for a job in Tulare County after serving one-and-a-half years as CAO. Following his exit, Manuel Lopez has been serving as interim CAO.

CA Lawmakers Trying To Make It Easier To Pass Local Tax Measures

[03/27/2019 12:22 pm PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

Sacramento, CA — Currently local bond and tax measures require a two-thirds majority of the votes to pass, but some state lawmakers would like to see the percentage reduced.

A group of Democratic leaders are pushing for a constitutional amendment to be placed on the 2020 state ballot measure to reduce the figure to 55-percent. Democratic Assemblywoman Cecilia Aguiar-Curry argues that the two-thirds requirement allows a small minority to derail needed projects. However, some state taxpayer organizations are voicing early opposition, arguing that it would hurt property owners.

The change would apply to local ballot measures raising revenue for infrastructure projects like parks,

Public Works lays out \$14.6M plan for Butte Fire road repairs

- [by Dakota Morlan](#) / The Calaveras Enterprise
- Mar 27, 2019 Updated Mar 27, 2019

Calaveras County Director of Public Works and Transportation Joshua Pack presented a tentative three-year plan for the repair of roads impacted by the Butte Fire at a Board of Supervisors meeting on Tuesday.

The plan will be funded by the \$25.4 million settlement the county received last year from the Pacific Gas & Electric Co., which was found responsible for the 2015 fire. Next month, the board will vote on a plan to utilize the \$20.2 million at its disposal after legal fees were subtracted.

At a previous meeting, Supervisor Jack Garamendi proposed that nearly three-quarters of that amount be designated to Public Works for road repairs.

Pack's \$14.6 million proposal was well-received during the March 26 meeting. The plan recommended the repair and repaving of at least 24 county road segments that are within the Butte Fire burn scar or were damaged by emergency access use.

Based on a list compiled shortly after the fire, some of the top priority roads are Mountain Ranch, Sheep Ranch, Railroad Flat and Jesus Maria.

Pack estimated that roughly 70 percent of the work would be contracted out, including the \$9 million allotted for construction. He also recommended the hiring of up to eight seasonal employees, totalling \$750,000, in order to prevent the disruption of other Public Works services. Additionally, the proposed budget includes funding for equipment purchases, prep work such as clearing culverts and trees, construction management, engineering and inspection support, subtotalling \$13.3 million with a 10 percent contingency for variances, unexpected repairs and escalation of costs.

Pack emphasized that the plan does not include any significant engineering or construction of new paved roads, but rather restores affected areas to their condition prior to the fire.

"The costs that go along with (significant engineering) are so high," Pack said. "It takes a lot of effort to go beyond. My goal is to get as much pavement on the road in areas affected by the scar and areas surrounding as possible."

The repaved roads would cost less to maintain and yield an expected lifespan of up to 20 years, Pack said.

In order to maintain accountability, Pack proposed that the three-year repair efforts be incorporated into the county's Capital Improvement Plan, which would allow for continual input from the board and the public.

If the board approves the plan in April, Pack said efforts could begin as early as late summer, with construction beginning in spring or summer of next year and concluding in fall 2022.

Update: Mother Lode experiencing widespread phone, internet outages

- [by Dakota Morlan](#) / The Calaveras Enterprise
- Mar 28, 2019 Updated 22 hrs ago

Local services including the Calaveras County Sheriff's Office and Adventist Health Sonora have reported loss of phone service in a widespread outage that has impacted the Mother Lode region and Sacramento, as well as a number of locations throughout the United States.

"A connectivity issue is causing a service interruption in parts of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties in Northern (California)," Verizon representative Heidi Flato told the Enterprise. "Our engineers are working with our vendor partners to resolve this issue quickly."

An outage map from the AT&T website shows outages in many of the same areas.

A representative from AT&T told the Enterprise that the outage has affected wireless, internet and landline services, and that there is no estimate yet as to when those services will be back online.

Phone service representatives have not commented on the cause of the outage, but the Sonora Police Department reported that AT&T located damaged lines near Wallace.

A number of county landlines and websites have been impacted, including the sheriff's office.

According to the sheriff's office, the 911 emergency system is still in operation.

"On 3-28-2019 at approximately 1:00 AM the Calaveras, Alpine and Tuolumne County Sheriff's Offices suffered interrupted services to their AT&T 911 and business lines," stated a sheriff's office news release. "The 911 system is operating via an alternative network. The non-emergency business lines are limited. Persons needing non-emergency assistance from the Sheriff's Office are encouraged to come to the main Sheriff's Office for assistance. AT&T is working diligently working to repair the service. The estimated time for repair is 9:00 PM."

Adventist Health Sonora has also established an emergency access line and can be reached at 1-971-274-2509.

More information will be released as it becomes available.

Update 12:00 p.m.: A response from AT&T was added to this article.

Update 2:36 p.m.: More information regarding the cause of the outage was added to this article.

Road to the future

County making progress on affordable housing amid high building costs

- [By Davis Harper](#) / The Calaveras Enterprise
- Mar 28, 2019

The 2019-2027 Calaveras County General Plan housing element update is up for public review, according to a Planning Department press release.

The state-mandated periodic update includes goals, policies and implementation programs to address availability, affordability and community needs pertaining to housing.

Based on the update, the county is facing a myriad of challenges.

The 2008 recession threw a wrench into construction plans countywide, and even with the county rebounding from the downturn, rising building costs over the past decade have compounded the issue, according to Planning Director Peter Maurer.

Less than 20 percent of homes destroyed in the 2015 Butte Fire have been rebuilt.

“We’ve got plenty of vacant land – the problem is that no one is building in the county,” Maurer told the Enterprise in a March 21 phone interview. “The cost of construction (generally) exceeds rent or sales value of what can be made for affordable housing projects.”

High construction costs associated with state fire safety and energy conservation requirements present challenges for the county in attracting developers to invest.

Updated in 2008, building code requires sprinkler installation in any new construction, which can cost thousands of dollars for homeowners, according to Economic Development Director Kathy Gallino.

“The developer won’t eat that,” Gallino said. “It has to be passed on to consumers.”

Maurer said that the county is looking at the feasibility of reducing building code standards to lessen costs for new owners, which could mean eliminating the sprinkler requirement for certain-sized homes.

“The trade-off is obviously that the standards were put into place to protect life and safety,” Maurer said. “Can such standards be waived without risking the health and safety of the county’s citizens? That is something that will have to be looked into.”

State policies also have conflicting desires to achieve both affordable and energy-efficient housing, Maurer said. An example is installing windows that reduce heat loss to meet state goals for greenhouse gas emissions.

Although the investment could save money down the road, the upfront costs of energy conservation measures are too high for homeowners to take on.

“While it’s good to make housing as energy-efficient as possible, it’s too expensive (for most homeowners),” Maurer said.

The update also indicated that nearly 50 percent of Calaveras households are paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent or mortgages.

“When you run the numbers, there’s not that much housing available for people trying to work for a living at the mean salary level,” Maurer said.

Part of the reason for the lack of available housing is that seniors (residents over 65 years of age) make up about 25 percent of the population, more than double the statewide percentage.

In tourism-centered towns along the Highway 4 corridor, vacation rentals are cutting into the permanent housing stock and driving prices up for the local workforce, Maurer said, with reference to Copperopolis, Murphys and Arnold.

Nearly 40 percent (10,180 units) of the county’s housing stock is vacant – a substantially higher rate than the state’s 8 percent – but about 80 percent of the county’s vacant units are classified as “for seasonal, recreational or occasional use.”

The county is reliant on tourism revenues, and “We want to be able to provide lodging for our guests, but at the same time we need to provide housing for those that work in that industry,” Maurer said. “If you’re a tasting room manager in Murphys and you have to commute from somewhere else into the county, it’s not very effective or desirable.”

Maurer pointed to the 2018 voter-approved ban on short-term rentals in South Lake Tahoe – a hot tourist destination with nearly 1,400 vacation home rentals – as an example of how local governments are handling this kind of issue.

For the economic development context, Gallino emphasized the need for a career technical education-skilled workforce in Calaveras County as a crucial factor in achieving a “vibrant, healthy economy.” That wouldn’t be possible without affordable-workforce housing, Gallino said.

“There is a great need for a skilled workforce in the trades, and we don’t have good a set of pathways for kids to find technical career paths to support (the) local economy,” Gallino said. “Not every family can afford to send their kids off to college. They need places to live that are affordable.”

As listed in the update, the county proposes to prioritize “permit processing to development projects that include an affordable residential component,” offer incentives for projects that include units for low-income households and continue to apply for state and federal funding to “support public agencies and private entities involved in the provision of affordable housing.”

Current and future housing projects

Health and Human Services Director Kristin Brinks has been working with the Stanislaus Regional Housing Authority (SRHA) on developing a 23-unit complex near San Andreas Elementary School called Foothill Terrace.

The SRHA is a nonprofit, public corporation that works with various counties to address unmet housing needs.

Located on the same property as the Federal Emergency Management Agency units that housed Butte Fire victims, the site was acquired by the housing authority a year ago with the goal of building up more workforce housing in the community, according to Jim Kruse, the nonprofit’s deputy director.

The one-bedroom units will be approximately 560 to 580 square feet with washers and dryers included. Depending on costs of construction – which will be funded through bonds – the housing authority is aiming to keep rental prices between \$800 to \$950, Kruse said.

“Our hope is that once we have those developments we can use this same model in other locations throughout the county,” Kruse said.

The project is just one of the county’s numerous undertakings to meet housing needs and align with housing element goals, Brinks said.

“This is one particular strategy that is very much in line with the housing element,” Brinks said of Foothill Terrace. “I’m proud to be a part of the project. I think it demonstrates how collaboration can lead to success, and this will be a success.”

Kruse said Foothill Terrace is slated to break ground between June and August of 2019.

A series of “Copper Valley” projects seeks to bring in 800 new homes to expand the Saddle Creek housing development in Copperopolis.

Those projects are looking at various housing options, from “high-end golf course homes” to multifamily, senior and entry-level housing, Gallino said.

Angels Camp city leaders are tackling affordable housing as well, with pending applications to the

Planning Department for 36 units on Murphys Grade Road past Bret Harte High School and 87 Habitat for Humanity units, according to City Planner Amy Augustine.

Angels Camp has its own General Plan with the same requirements and deadlines as the county.

Augustine said the city hopes to get the Murphys Grade Road application to the Planning Commission by June, after which “We’d be working with them to start building.”

As for medium- to high-priced housing, the city has sold 38 of its 55 new lots in the DeNova Housing Development in Greenhorn Creek, and is close to finalizing another five, Augustine said.

In the Valley Springs area, work-force housing demands will likely increase when its new Health and Wellness Center comes online, Maurer said. Slated to open in August, the facility will employ 30 to 35 people.

“Everyone wants to live as close to their work as they can,” Maurer said.

The housing element update will be available for review and comments from April 1 to June 1 at the Planning Department, 754 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas, or online at planning.calaverasgov.us/Gen-Plan-Zoning/Housing-Element.

Update: AT&T Outage Restored

[03/28/2019 7:06 pm PST](#)

Tracey Petersen and BJ Hansen, MML News Team

Update at 7 p.m.: Clarke Broadcasting has been notified by residents across Tuolumne County about cell phone, landline and internet service being restored. Tuolumne County Sheriff’s Office Spokesperson Sgt. Andrea Benson confirms that it’s AT&T service has also been restored. AT&T is not immediately commenting.

As reported earlier, the interruption in service, due to damaged cables in Wallace, was an AT&T issue, although customers of other service providers, like Verizon, had similar problems. Further details on the outage are below.

Update 2:45 p.m.: Tuolumne County Sheriff’s Officials have released these updated non-emergency contact numbers for their dispatch office. These are NOT numbers for AT&T:

- 209-768-3666
- 209-768-0936
- 209-768-6043

As reported below, AT&T has relayed to the Calaveras County Sheriff’s Office an estimated repair time of 9 p.m. Further details on the outage are also below.

Update at 1:45 p.m.: Calaveras County Sheriff’s Officials have relayed that AT&T has given them an estimated repair time of 9 p.m.

Update at 12pm: There is still not an estimated restoration time for the cell phone and landline outage being experienced in parts of Tuolumne and Calaveras counties today, according to AT&T. It is also impacting the internet service of several businesses in the area. AT&T reported earlier that a road construction crew damaged some of its cables early this morning.

It was reportedly in the Clements area.

In addition, the Sonora Police Department reports that AT&T has relayed that it will be an “extended repair time,” but no specifics are known.

Below you can find alternative phone numbers to reach various law enforcement agencies during the outage. In addition, the CHP Sonora office reports that its phone lines are down. In an emergency, call 911. If you need to reach the office for a non-emergency related matter you can call 209-356-2900.

Update at 11:10am: Cell phone and landline service remains down for many customers throughout Tuolumne and Calaveras counties today. The outage started at around 1am.

AT&T spokesperson Ryan Oliver has relayed a statement to Clarke Broadcasting, “Service for some customers in the Sonora and surrounding areas may be affected after a road construction crew damaged our cables while working earlier today. Our team is onsite and working to repair the damage as quickly as possible.”

The Sonora Police Department earlier stated that the incident occurred in the Wallace area of Calaveras County. AT&T has not indicated when service will be restored, or exactly how many people are impacted.

We have also received reports of customers of other service providers having similar issues. It is also impacting some businesses that are experiencing a correlating internet outage (see photo).

Update at 10am: The phone outage we have been reporting on is also impacting Adventist Health Sonora, so some additional phone lines are available for residents needing to reach the hospital:

Main Line: 1-971-274-2509 : Registration/Admitting: 1-971-274-2510 : Emergency Department: 1-971-274-2511 : Clinic Services/Medical Offices: 1-971-274-2512

Update at 9:10am: Due to the AT&T outage, there are some alternate numbers to reach the Tuolumne County Sheriff’s Office. You can dial 1-916-912-4685 (ext. 46101, 46102 or 46106)

911 emergency calls are being received by the Sonora Police Department dispatch.

To alert CAL Fire to an emergency, you can call 209-770-7081 or 209-770-7086.

Update at 8:20am: The Sonora Police Department reports that damaged AT&T lines were located in the community of Clements, which led to the widespread outage this morning. The outage is impacting cell and landline customers in both Tuolumne and Calaveras counties. It is unclear when there will be full restoration.

Original story posted at 7am: Sonora, CA — Many AT&T customers in the Mother Lode are reporting issues with cell and landline services this morning.

The Sonora Police Department reports that most residential landlines in the city and county are still able to make 911 emergency calls. The PD adds that AT&T is aware of the situation and is working to identify and isolate the problem. AT&T has not provided an estimated restoration time.

Feds Sue Water Board Over ‘Water Grab’ Citing CEQA, New Melones

[03/28/2019 4:05 pm PST](#)

ori James, MML News Reporter

Sonora, CA — The Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of the Interior have filed civil

actions, in both federal and state court, against the California State Water Resources Control Board over its plan to seek increased unimpaired flows for the benefit of fish species.

The Feds announced the move Thursday. As [reported here](#), it was back in December when the Water Board approved and adopted amendments to its Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta Estuary and Substitute Environmental Document. The move was criticized by water suppliers and others as a massive water grab.

According to the complaint, the Amended Plan fails to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and, once implemented, will impair the Department of the Interior’s ability to operate New Melones Dam consistent with Congressional directives.

As [reported here](#), the Water Board is already facing multiple lawsuits over its action, including one filed in Tuolumne County Superior Court by multiple entities that include Tri-Dam Project Partners the Oakdale (OID) and South Jan Joaquin (SSJIR) water districts that developed and maintain senior water rights at New Melones.

Commenting on the latest suit, voluntary settlement agreements in progress among water suppliers and his district’s own filing against the Water Board, OID General Manager Steve Knell shares, “With the Federal suit filed we anticipate all State actions for the implementation of the WQCP to likely come to a halt. VSA negotiations will also likely be sidelined. The Federal suit against the State puts into question the validity of the findings contained in the WQCP, hence the outcome of the suit could result in significant changes to the document. Because of that probability, there is no sense in continuing to negotiate if you don’t know how the endpoints might be changed.”

The Feds further explain their position in the below excerpt from their announcement about the filing:

“The environmental analysis by the California State Water Resources Control Board hid the true impacts of their plan and could put substantial operational constraints on the Department of the Interior’s ability to effectively operate the New Melones Dam, which plays a critical role in flood control, irrigation, and power generation in the Sacramento region,” said Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey Bossert Clark for the Department of Justice’s Environment and Natural Resources Division. “The Department of Justice will continue to advocate on behalf of our federal partners, especially when it comes to the proper application of federal and state environmental laws.”

“As stated in our letter to the Board on July 27, 2018, today’s lawsuit affirms the Bureau of Reclamation’s continued opposition to the State Water Board plan. The plan poses an unacceptable risk to Reclamation’s water storage and power generation capabilities at the New Melones Project in California and to local recreational opportunities,” said Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman. “We pledge our commitment to environmentally and economically sound water management for California’s farms, families, business, and natural resources, and the American public as a whole.”

CEQA is a California statute which requires state and local agencies to identify the significant environmental impacts of their actions and to avoid or mitigate those impacts, if feasible. The lawsuits filed today allege that in approving the amended plan and final SED, the Board failed to comply with the requirements of CEQA in a number of ways:

- The Board failed to provide an accurate, stable and finite project description, because the Board analyzed a project materially different from the project described in the project description;
- The Board improperly masked potential environmental impacts of the amended plan by including carryover storage targets and other reservoir controls – mitigation measures – in its impacts analysis and by not analyzing the impacts of the amended plan on the environment without reservoir controls; and

- The Board failed to adequately analyze the impacts of the amended plan, including with respect to water temperature and related water quality conditions, and water supply.

As alleged in the lawsuits, the United States will be directly and substantially impacted by the Board's actions, which impacts include, but are not limited to, operational constraints on the New Melones Project, loss of available surface water supplies for New Melones Project purposes, including Central Valley Project (CVP) water service contracts, and involuntary dedication of federal reservoir space for Board purposes.

The New Melones Dam is a federally owned Reclamation facility and a component of the federal CVP. The Dam stores water under permits issued by the State of California, and delivers water from storage to irrigation and water districts under contracts entered into under federal reclamation law. The lawsuits further allege that the new flow objectives will significantly reduce the amount of water available in New Melones reservoir for meeting congressionally authorized purposes of the New Melones Project, including irrigation, municipal and industrial purposes, power generation, and recreational opportunities at New Melones. The reduced water available for New Melones Project purposes would also impair Reclamation's delivery of water under contracts it presently holds with irrigation and water districts.

The United States is represented in this action by Assistant Attorney General Clark and United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott; with lead counsel Stephen M. Macfarlane, Romney Philpott, Erika Norman of the Natural Resources Section; and Kelli L. Taylor of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of California.

RCRC – The Barbed Wire – March 29, 2019

Governor Newsom Cautions PG&E Over Potential New Board

On Thursday, Governor Gavin Newsom sent a cautionary letter to executives at the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) over their presumed intent to reconstitute their board of directors with out-of-state executives with little to no experience in California, and inadequate expertise in utility operations. The letter was a strong rebuke of the utility, stating that its intended board would be more "broken public trust and its responsibilities to ratepayers, wildfire victims, and employees," while asserting that the state and its people deserve better treatment, and imploring the utility to look for Californians who have experience to provide its leadership.

Governor Newsom formed a "strike team" in February 2019 to advise the state on PG&E's bankruptcy proceeding and gave the group 60 days to map out a plan to help ensure that ratepayers' service remains intact while wildfire victims get justice and ratepayers and employees remain protected. Results from the team's efforts are expected within the next few weeks.

Governor Newsom's letter can be accessed [here](#).

Caltrans to start clearing Ebbetts Pass in coming weeks

- [By Davis Harper](#) / The Calaveras Enterprise
- Mar 29, 2019 Updated 39 min ago

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) crews will begin seasonal clearing of Ebbetts Pass

on Highway 4 on Apr. 8, according to a Caltrans press release.

The agency is aiming to have Ebbetts Pass (Alpine County), Sonora Pass (Tuolumne County) and Monitor Pass (Alpine County) cleared by May 26 for Memorial Day Weekend, but late season storms, snow accumulation and resources could delay opening of winter passes.

Snow removal efforts at Lake Alpine Sno-park off Highway 4 will limit snowmobile access on the highway.

In addition to snow and hazardous tree removal, the work will consist of unclogging drains, replacing downed signs, regrading of roadside ditches to prevent spring runoff from flooding the roadway and sealing cracks and re-striping the roadway.

Along the Highway 26 corridor east of Glencoe, Caltrans crews are still working to reopen a 2.5-mile stretch of road from Deardorff Road to Woodhouse Mine Road that was severely eroded by a rainstorm in February.

“There is not an estimated date of opening yet for SR-26 in Calaveras County, but we will inform the public as soon as there is,” said Thomas Lawrence, Caltrans District 10 public information officer. “Our contractor continues to work on placing (and replacing) culverts (underground drainage systems) and removing trees, brush, and other material.”

Local officials weigh in on governor’s wildfire emergency declaration

- [By Davis Harper](#)
- Mar 29, 2019 Updated 3 hrs ago

Local efforts to reduce wildfire threats continue to move forward across the county, while many other projects are locked in environmental review stages.

According to the agency’s tree mortality and fuel reduction update for February, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) has treated almost 70 acres across 11 projects in Calaveras and Tuolumne counties this year.

Cal Fire’s Blue Lake Springs Fuel Break project is a part of a landscape effort to protect the Highway 4 corridor.

Surrounded by federal, state and private land, the 2-acre project connects with existing fuels-reduction projects in the area to create a barrier between the Blue Lake Springs community and surrounding forest.

The Enterprise visited the work site with Cal Fire Capts. Isaac Rushdoony and Ryan Buchanan on Monday.

A Vallecito Conservation Camp handcrew stacked logs and brush into burn piles as the captains discussed what they described as a “shaded fuel break.”

“We’re trying to take out the dead materials, snags and open the (canopy) so if we do get retardant in here (during a fire), the retardant actually hits the ground,” Rushdoony said, a pile of brush smoldering behind him.

Brush will grow back in two to three years, and the area should be treated again within five years,

Rushdoony said.

Most fuel breaks are not funded for maintenance, and the agency will have to apply for funding in the future, Rushdoony added.

On March 22, Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency on wildfires and issued an executive order to expedite 35 fuel-reduction projects across the state before fire season.

While none of those projects are in Calaveras County, local officials say the order is a step in the right direction for fire safety.

“I’m really hopeful that if these 35 projects are successful, we can continue moving forward,” said Josh White, the unit chief for the Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit of Cal Fire.

White said the projects will still operate under forest practice laws, but will be fast-tracking the California Environmental Quality Act process. That includes surveying for impacts on historical artifacts and wildlife, which can take six months to a year to complete.

Calaveras County Resource Conservation District (RCD) Executive Director Gordon Long said “it was disappointing” that the governor’s list of projects did not include any work in the Mother Lode.

“This is very surprising since we have so many communities at risk that are considered high fire risk,” Long said, adding that Calaveras County itself has 35 high-fire-risk communities.

“Our only hope is to educate and impress upon our state leaders that our Central Sierra counties are in dire need of increased pace and scale of fuels-reduction projects.”

Long said the district will work with Cal Fire, the county and other collaborators to establish a project list from the TCU for Newsom’s consideration for the “next round of streamlined fuels-reduction projects.”

Citing the potential for high-severity wildfires after a century of accumulated fuels from suppression efforts, John Buckley, executive director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, a Twain Harte-based environmental nonprofit, voiced approval for the governor’s order as well.

“If local, state and federal agencies start planning now to do needed projects as soon as possible, those projects can be done consistent with environmental laws that protect water quality, wildlife, scenic values, air quality and rare plants,” Buckley said. “The challenge is for local, state and federal politicians to provide the money needed to ramp up projects, and to turn the corner on the backlog of so many decades of accumulated fuels.”

This year, the Calaveras Foothills Fire Safe Council successfully obtained around \$3.2 million in fuels-reduction activities covering nearly 3,000 acres, according to Bill Fullerton, spokesman for the council.

The group is still “a couple months out from having on-the-ground work done as we are awaiting on the environmental compliance work to be completed,” Fullerton said.

Fullerton said any ability to shorten environmental procedures would “assist us in completing those projects sooner, thus hopefully making our communities more resilient to catastrophic wildfires.”

Since 2018, the Calaveras-Amador Forestry Team has secured more than \$5.5 million in grant funding for forest-thinning projects as well, according to CalAm grant writer Pat McGreevy.

While many agree with expediting these efforts, environmental groups around the state continue to claim that home hardening (retrofitting homes with ember-resistant materials) should be more of a focus.

A March 24 post from the California Chaparral Institute, a nonprofit educational and research

organization based in Southern California, argues that the fuel reduction-centered approach to protecting communities is not guided by fire science.

The order “ignores science, dismisses the lessons of the 2017 and 2018 wildfires, and is following the pattern President Trump has established – if facts get in the way of ideology, circumvent the facts,” the post reads. “The wind-driven wildfires that kill the most people and burn the most homes are the fires where fuel breaks are irrelevant.”

The group co-signed a Jan. 11 letter to Gov. Newsom with recommendations from fire ecologists and environmental leaders across the state to shift the focus to fireproofing homes.

Cal Fire State Fire Marshal Mike Richwine told state Assembly members in a Feb. 25 hearing that “We need to educate on the benefits of home hardening. It’s proven to dramatically increase the chance of a home surviving a wildfire.”

A Feb. 22 Cal Fire report to the governor ranked fuel reduction as an “immediate term” priority and “identifying options for retrofitting homes to new wildland urban interface standards” as a “medium term” objective.

The report estimated that as many as 15 million acres of California forests need some form of restoration.

Rushdoony said it can be difficult to meet deadlines on some fuel break projects, as the agency starts staffing stations by May 1 to start training in preparation for fire season.

“The average homeowner doesn’t have the resources, time or money to be able to do this,” Buchanan said, observing the manicured hillside – a stark contrast to the dense tangles of foliage and downed logs on the other side of the project boundary.
