

Weekly ReCAP for May 25, 2019

Notices:

Next CPC meeting on June 3, 2019 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., location-Volunteer Center in San Andreas (directions below)

The address for the Volunteer Center is 255 Lewis Avenue, San Andreas, CA (P.O.Box 196, San Andreas, CA 95249)

We share the same address as the San Andreas Elementary School, but we are located on the lower terrace, just down from the school office.

In San Andreas at the blinking light in town, take Main Street (old Hwy 49) past the Metropolitan, across the little bridge and turn right on Lewis Avenue. After about one block, Lewis Ave turns into a one-way street and our driveway is at the bottom of the *steep* hill, at the end of the chain link fence.

ACTION ALERT!

The Calaveras County Planning Commission will hold its last set of General Plan Update hearings on May 29 (6:00 PM), 30 (9:00 AM); June 6 and 7 (Both June meetings begin at 9:00 AM).

The Planning Commission is expected to limit speakers to 3 minutes each. The Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC) has more to say than it has speakers to say it.

If you can help by delivering a speech on one of these days, please email CPC Facilitator Tom Infusino at tomi@volcano.net as soon as possible, and he will provide you with the information you need.

If you prefer to speak as an individual, and are interested in reviewing talking points and hearing schedules, please consult the CAP/CPC website at www.calaverascap.com.

The Calaveras County General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report indicates that development under the proposed general plan will lead to significant impacts to aesthetics, agriculture, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, historical resources, oak woodlands, public services and utilities, traffic circulation, and wildlife habitat.

The County needs to adopt many additional feasible mitigation measures to protect the human and natural environments.

The County needs to adopt a monitoring and reporting plan to ensure that promised mitigation is timely, implemented, and effective. The County needs to adopt many public interest policies, routinely implemented in other rural counties, to make life better for existing and future residents.

The County needs to include additional community plans in its Community Planning Element.

The CPC has been advocating for general plan improvements since the update process began in 2006. Please join us at the Planning Commission hearings.

The CPC is a group of community organizations and individuals who want a healthy and sustainable future for Calaveras County. We believe that public participation is critical to a successful planning process. United behind eleven land use and development principles, we seek to balance the conservation of local agricultural, natural and historic resources, with the need to provide jobs, housing, safety, and services. To make a financial contribution please go to our website at www.calaverascap.com.

Foothill Conservancy: Job Opportunity

Hey, friends:

Foothill Conservancy is looking for a half-time Watershed Conservation Advocate to help with our watershed program. The position is based in Jackson.

Brief job description:

Under the supervision of the Foothill Conservancy Executive Director, the Watershed Conservation Advocate will work closely with consultants and key Conservancy watershed program volunteers. The Advocate will learn how to effectively advocate for river and watershed conservation and restoration in meetings of collaborative river and watershed groups and public agencies; prepare meeting summaries and other written and oral reports; help develop river and watershed- related policies, programs, and projects; assist in watershed-related communication, public education and outreach; support the work of the Conservancy's Watershed Committee; and assist in raising funds for the Conservancy's watershed program.

For more information, see <http://www.foothillconservancy.org/WCA>

Please share with anyone you think might be interested and on any job boards you maintain.

Thanks,

Katherine

General Plan Update

Letter to the Editor Submitted by Tom Infusino of Pine Grove, Facilitator Calaveras Planning Coalition / Calaveras Enterprise / May 4, 2019

Editor,

During the Board of Supervisors' public comment period on Tuesday, April 23, representatives of the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC) encouraged the Board of Supervisors to include more information from more communities in the text of the proposed Community Planning Element. The proposed Community Planning Element is the part of the General Plan Update that contains excerpts from the community plans drafted by the people of Supervisor District 2, and by the people of San Andreas. It also includes excerpts from the Rancho Calaveras Special Plan. It contains no information from community planning efforts in Valley Springs, Copperopolis and in the communities along the Highway 4 corridor.

Colleen Platt recommended adding to the General Plan Update the three-page Copperopolis Community Plan completed in 2013 and the 4.5-page Valley Springs Community Plan that was completed in 2017, and recommended for adoption by the Planning Director.

Jack Norton asked, "How is it in the public interest to eliminate from the general plan all the policies from all of the Highway 4 corridor community plans?" He encouraged the supervisors to include in the General Plan Update all the policies in the community plans that contribute to the public interest.

Joyce Techel concluded the presentation by giving the Supervisors a history lesson.

"For seven years, from 2007-2013, citizens were assured that their community plans would be part of the General Plan" she said. Techel encouraged the supervisors to "rise to the occasion" and to, "Give local residents and their communities the consideration they deserve."

If you live in on the Highway 4 corridor, in Copperopolis or in Valley Springs, now is the time for you to contact your county supervisor and ask for your community plan information to be included in the General Plan Update. The Board of Supervisors will make its decision this summer.

Creating a General Plan Update for all county residents

Tom Infusino Guest Opinion /m Calaveras Enterprise / May 16, 2019

Over the last six years the estimates of future population growth in Calaveras County have dropped dramatically. In 2013, the Board of Supervisors asked for a general plan to accommodate an additional 30,000 people by 2035. As of 2016, the California Department of Finance, an agency that specializes in population projections, estimates the county will grow by only 2,500 people by 2035.

How could this be good news? Because, for the first time, the general plan in Calaveras County has the opportunity to focus on improving the lives of the people who are already here. Unfortunately, those preparing the Calaveras County General Plan Update continue to plan for a completely unsubstantiated multitude of new residents, and they are planning poorly.

The General Plan Update includes a map that designates the acceptable locations of additional residential, commercial and industrial development. The county estimates that this land-use designation map accommodates an additional population of at least 70,000 people. However, there is no calculation to show how many people are expected to fit into each community. There is no explanation of how these growth numbers will be reconciled with the limited capacity of existing community drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. There is no indication of how this infrastructure will be expanded and at what cost to whom. There is no commitment to implement enough programs in time to reduce the impacts of new development.

Incredibly, there has been no explanation from county staff or elected officials of why we would want this kind of plan for development. The county's own environmental impact report admits that buildout of this general plan will make our lives and communities significantly worse in 25 different ways. As the state's General Plan Guidelines state, "The general plan is more than the legal underpinning for land use decisions; it is a vision about how a community will grow, reflecting community priorities and values while shaping the future."

Fortunately, there is another vision for the future of Calaveras County, one in which the focus of county government is improving the lives of the people who are already here. In that vision the county is committed to low taxes and low utility rates for senior homeowners, committed to workforce housing for families, committed to job training for young people, committed to rebuilding homes for fire victims, committed to providing water for ranchers, and committed to wildfire safety in local forests. It is a vision of a county government focused on lifting up all the people. It is a vision rooted in the heartfelt aspirations hundreds of people expressed during the general plan workshops from 2007 to 2010. It is the vision that the Calaveras Planning Coalition continues to promote today.

To fully reap the benefits of our future, the government sector, the private sector and the non-profit sector have to find ways to work together, which begins by talking with one another, not

just at one another. If the county allows for constructive give-and-take conversations during the Planning Commission's upcoming six days of hearings, we can fix the General Plan Update.

The Calaveras Planning Coalition invites you to join us at the Planning Commission for the General Plan Update hearings on May 22, 23, 29, 30, and June 6 and 7. We will speak at these hearings not merely because we still have a flicker of faith that our public officials will listen, but because we still have hearts filled with hope that together we can build a brighter future with the friends and neighbors we love in a county called Calaveras.

Tom Infusino is the facilitator of the Calaveras Planning Coalition. For more information, consult CPC's website at calaverascap.com.

Published May 16, 2019 at 06:23PM

Proposed high-dollar developments in southern Tuolumne County draw mixed reactions from locals

Alex MacLean / Union Democrat / May 16, 2019

Outside investors with deep pockets are eyeing the Highway 120 corridor in southern Tuolumne County for several high-end commercial development projects that have the potential to attract thousands of new tourists and pump an additional \$1 million or more into local government coffers each year.

However, not all those who live, run businesses, and own property from Big Oak Flat to the entrance of Yosemite National Park are in favor of the plans, which they fear could hurt the way of life they've long enjoyed and have unforeseen consequences on local emergency services that are funded by their tax dollars.

About 50 people reportedly attended a public meeting on Monday in Groveland hosted by county planners to gather comments and concerns about the largest of the proposed projects — a sprawling, multi-million-dollar resort on 64 acres at the northeast corner of Highway 120 and Sawmill Mountain Road, about 17 miles east of the historic Gold Rush town.

The so-called Terra Vi Lodge would be built and owned by the Hansji Corp., an Anaheim-based developer known for its multimillion-dollar high-rise hotels in downtown Phoenix, while the land would remain under the ownership of the family of the late Tim Manly.

There's another proposed project just down the road on land that's also owned by the Manly family to develop a seasonal campground with 99 luxury tents that would be operated by the

company Under Canvas, which bills itself as the nation's premier provider of the experience referred to as "glamping."

Manly's son, Bob Manly, of Moccasin, said his father purchased the land in the late 1980s and got the zoning changed from timberland to commercial in the 1990s because he always dreamed of one day developing something on it similar to what's being proposed.

"That's what he wanted for this property and saw the future in it," Bob Manly said. "We're just trying to make it happen."

The Tuolumne County Planning Commission was scheduled to hold a public hearing in Sonora on Wednesday night to consider a use permit for the "glamping" project, but the developers postponed it at the last minute to address community concerns.

Quincy Yaley, assistant director of the county Community Resources Agency, said about 20 people gave verbal comments and others provided written statements during the meeting on Monday about the Terra Vi Lodge project.

According to others who attended, all but one of the people who spoke expressed opposition to the project moving forward.

The purpose was to gather concerns from the public that will be studied in the process of preparing an environmental impact report, which is required by California law to be completed for any project that's expected to have unavoidable impacts on the environment.

"We want to study what the real impacts will be compared to the perceived impacts," Yaley said of what comes next. "From my perspective, the scoping meeting worked exactly as it should. We got a lot of great information that we'll be looking at through the process."

Yaley said the studies and final report will likely take several months to complete, if not longer.

The chief issues expressed by those at the meeting on Monday focused on traffic, noise, water supply, on-site treatment of sewage, and impacts to wildlife, according to Yaley.

People also voiced concerns about the proposed resort's potential need for emergency services, such as police, fire protection, and ambulance, that are funded by taxpayers who live and own property along the corridor.

"That's a big concern for neighbors, as recreational or commercial development continues up toward Yosemite National Park, it draws away those services from Groveland," Yaley said. "We will be looking at that through the environmental impact report and mitigate those impacts."

Dan Courtney, of La Jolla, is one of the opponents of the project who attended the meeting on Monday because his family owns a one-bedroom cabin that's adjacent to where the resort would be constructed.

Courtney said his top concern is about the risk of fire and being unable to access his only escape route via Highway 120 due to traffic from the resort, which is proposed to have a three-story lodge with 140 guestrooms, 25 detached cabins with 100 total guestrooms, a public market, two-story event center, and helicopter landing pad.

“If they’ve got 700 people there, how the heck are we going to pass them to get to 120? That’s the only way out,” he said.

Another concern Courtney has about both the proposed resort and nearby luxury-tent campground using wells and septic systems for providing water and sewer services, due to being too far away from the Groveland Community Services District’s infrastructure.

Courtney believes that the county should be required to look at the impacts from both of the projects cumulatively as opposed to separate from each other. He also feels the county should consider that many of the cabins near the proposed sites have been in people’s families for generations.

“The expectation is that it would be low-density recreation in the character of the long-term established surrounding community which consists of one or two bedroom cabins, not high-rise resorts more typical for Orange County or Lake Tahoe.”

Two other projects planned between Groveland and Yosemite National Park are a \$60 million reconstruction of the Berkeley Tuolumne Camp on Hardin Flat Road that was mostly destroyed by the 2013 Rim Fire, as well as another resort with a two-story lodge containing 40 guest rooms and eight detached guest cottages just east of Smith Station Road and Highway 120.

The resort at Smith Station Road and Highway 120, which cover about 15 acres on a 150-acre property owned by the Holcomb Family Trust, was approved by the county in 2010.

Yaley said the family of the former owner, who has since passed away, are now interested in bringing the project forward and talking with county officials about the next step to obtain building and grading permits.

Liza McNulty, project manager for the Berkeley Tuolumne Camp, anticipates construction to begin on the project in spring of next year. They hope to have the camp opened for business by the summer of 2020.

McNulty said the camp’s maximum occupancy will remain the same — 300 campers and 60 staffers — though there will be slightly less buildings spread across a larger swath of U.S. Forest Service land due to changes in requirements.

The camp was constructed in 1922 by the City of Berkeley, which gives priority registration to its residents, and has remained closed since the Rim Fire while the city worked on renewing its special use permit with the Forest Service for the rebuild. Disaster recovery money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency is funding the project.

County Supervisor John Gray, who represents the south county area, said the flurry of interest from outside investors in the Highway 120 corridor is not surprising to him given the amount of vehicles that pass through on the way to the world-famous park and lack of vacancies in area hotels during busy times of the year.

“There have been a number of studies done that show there are room shortages in the area,” he said.

Gray and others also pointed to the success of Rush Creek Lodge, located a mile from the entrance to Yosemite, since opening in June 2016 as the first new resort to open near the park in 25-plus years.

The proposed projects would provide additional tax dollars for the county that could help support municipal services, Gray said, at a time when he and other supervisors have discussed the possibility of asking voters to increase tax rates due to the increasing cost of doing business.

Gray also said none of the projects are a “slam dunk,” and pointed to the property known by locals as “The Scar” between Big Oak Flat and Groveland as an example. The property is called that because it was left denuded of vegetation by failed development proposals over the past 40 years, which most recently included a hotel, restaurants, and an IMAX Theater.

Steve Anker, who runs Priest Station Café at the top of Priest Grade in Big Oak Flat, said he’s in favor of more places for people to stay along the Highway 120 corridor because his business benefits from the additional visitors, but he wants it to be done right and not become another eyesore like “The Scar” property.

“If development is done well, it can be a good thing,” he said. “If it’s done bad, it could be harmful.”

Anker said he foresees one problem for any of these projects should they become a reality will be finding enough employees to work at them due to a shortage of housing rentals in the area, primarily driven by the rise of people renting out their homes through Airbnb.

There are at least 383 active Airbnb rentals, mostly in the gated Pine Mountain Lake subdivision, with 354 being an entire house and 29 a single private room, according to data provided by Lisa Mayo, of the Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau.

“There used to be 20 rentals listed at any given time,” Anker said. “Now, I know a friend who was looking and there’s one.”

Others who live and have businesses in or around Groveland have said they would prefer such commercial developments be closer to town.

Joanie Gisler, owner of the specialty retail shop Ranch Revived in Groveland, said she grew up in the area and sees more people simply passing through the town as opposed to stopping and spending money at local businesses.

Gisler said she believes if the proposed developments were located closer to the town, it would be a greater boost to the local economy.

“We are the gateway to Yosemite and part of this county,” she said. “It’s great people are visiting the national park, we love that, but it would be great if they would promote our little town.”

Trump OKs FEMA Funding For 2019 Winter Storm Damage Recovery

[05/20/2019 4:42 pm PST](#)

Tori James, MML News Reporter

Sacramento, CA — President Donald Trump has granted federal disaster declarations that will help several counties, including Calaveras and Tuolumne, in recovery efforts from winter storm-caused flooding, mudslides and damage.

Governor Gavin Newsom on Monday shared that the President granted his office’s request for federal assistance to supplement state and local efforts to recover from the Feb. 24 through March 1 storm incidents.

Along with Calaveras and Tuolumne, the other counties able to tap FEMA funds include Amador, Butte, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mariposa, Mendocino, Monterey, Napa, Sonoma, Tehama, and Trinity. Federal funding is also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures statewide.

“I want to thank the President and FEMA for moving quickly to approve our requests,” Newsom stated. “This federal aid will get money and resources where they are needed and help communities recover.”

The Presidential Major Disaster declarations will help state, tribal and local governments with recovery projects, including the repair and replacement of disaster-damaged facilities and infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and utilities. The declarations include hazard mitigation, which helps state and local governments reduce the risks and impacts of future disasters.

Ponderosa Hills residents voice concerns about condition of escape route

Alex MacLean / Union Democrat / Nay 21, 2019

With anxiety mounting over the upcoming fire season, residents of the Ponderosa Hills subdivision between Tuolumne and Twain Harte say they're concerned about a key evacuation route that hasn't been properly maintained in more than three years.

Several people who live in the neighborhood attended a public meeting on Tuesday to ask the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors to prioritize fixing Mount Provo Road, one of two ways out for the roughly 800 residents.

The comments were made during an update on the county's efforts to prepare communities for potential blazes like last year's Camp Fire in Butte County that killed more than 80 people and incinerated the town of Paradise.

Michelle Bentz submitted a petition she and 17 of her neighbors signed that sought an accessible alternate evacuation route for the community.

"As it stands now, we only have one road in and one road out," said Bentz, who's lived in the neighborhood 16 years. "The last few years have been slightly terrifying not knowing where we can leave in the event that a fire would happen."

Other residents shared similar concerns about the road, which they said would be difficult for four-wheel-drive vehicles to drive without getting stuck.

County Supervisor Anaiah Kirk, who represents the area that is part of District 3, said he drove the road while campaigning for office last year and got stuck in his four-wheel-drive Toyota 4Runner.

"I barely made it out alive and there were no fires," Kirk joked, before adding that the experience and seeing the devastation from the deadly Camp Fire made him look into options for the road.

The road primarily belongs to the U.S. Forest Service but also goes through private property and land belonging to federal Bureau of Land Management, which makes getting approval to do work on it somewhat difficult.

Kirk said he found there have been five fires where people had to use that road. He said it has been three to five years since it's been maintained.

"If there was some way in the next few months to figure out a way to partner with the U.S. Forest Service and get a permit to address the road, that would be great, but my concern is we're running out of time," he said. "I need that road fixed."

Josh White, chief of the Cal Fire Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit, said his agency has the resources and equipment to quickly fix that road as long as they can get a permit from the Forest Service or whomever else would need to give them permission.

White said he's been hearing about the road since he became the chief of the unit six years ago.

County Supervisor Karl Rodefer described the project as "low hanging fruit that's achievable," but complicated due to the mix of owners.

"Once you get the permits, it's a matter of hours (to complete)," Rodefer said. "Not days or months."

Mountain Elizabeth Road in District 2 is in similar shape and would provide an alternate escape route for people in the Cedar Ridge area, according to County Supervisor Ryan Campbell, who represents that community.

The board also received an update from Liz Peterson, coordinator of the county Office of Emergency Services, about progress on an initiative launched at the beginning of the year to help communities improve fire safety and preparedness.

Peterson said a task force working on the initiative identified the six threats to address first as heavy fuels for fires, children in schools, a lack of individualized community plans, narrow road easements, limited ingress and egress options, and inadequate water infrastructure for fire flow.

County officials are also putting together a program to assist seniors and people with physical limitations in creating defensible space around their homes, which will be funded through a \$1.6 million state grant.

The initial five communities that will be targeted for the work are Ponderosa Hills, Cedar Ridge, Campo Seco/Campbells Flat area, Fir/Meadowbrook Drive area, and Big Oak Flat, which were identified as the most in need.

Money from the same grant is also being used to reduce brush and other fire fuels from the sides of roads. That work is scheduled to be done this month along Tuolumne, Cherokee, Ferretti and Priest Coulterville roads, followed by Phoenix Lake Road next month.

A separate \$96,000 grant that the county recently received from the state will also be used to develop a program that will help areas of the county become recognized as Firewise communities by the National Fire Protection Association, though the details are still being worked out.

The board also unanimously voted to establish a citizens advisory committee on fire safety that will have regular public meetings and consist of one member of the public from each of the five supervisorial districts, along with two at-large members.

County Undersheriff Neil Evans also attended the meeting and encouraged people to sign up for the county's Everbridge Emergency Notification System, which allows residents to receive alerts from the county Office of Emergency Services and Sheriff's Office.

People can register for the system online at www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov. Home, cell, or alternate phone numbers can be registered. Email and text notifications are also available.

Emergency information is also distributed by the offices through the radio, TV news, and their respective social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

“The Everbridge system is not a cure all, it’s not the only tool in the toolbox, but we would encourage the public to sign up with Everbridge so they can stay engaged with what’s happening,” Evans said of the need for residents to be vigilant.

[Environment](#)

As the climate crisis worsens, cities turn to parks

Cities across the U.S. are seeing worse floods and hotter summers, but experts believe urban parks can help residents cope.

By [Sarah Gibbens](#) / National Geographic

PUBLISHED May 21, 2019

City parks have long been a place for urban residents surrounded by the gray of asphalt and concrete to get a small dose of green. As cities increasingly feel the impacts of [rising seas and temperatures](#), city planners are rethinking the roles of urban parks.

“There’s been a quiet and profound move to use parks to help cities adapt to the realities of [climate change](#),” says Diane Regas, CEO of [The Trust for Public Land](#), an organization that works to create neighborhood and national parks.

Each year the trust publishes their [ParkScore Index](#), which ranks the top 100 largest U.S. cities by parks. The 2019 rankings will be released on Wednesday; Minneapolis won the highest ranking in 2018. The trust looks at size, convenience, amenities, and financial investment to compile its list.

While amenities like basketball hoops and playgrounds have long been assets that bumped cities into top spots, increasingly, Regas says, the trust is seeing cities build parks that can alleviate climate change effects like intense heat, flooding, and poor air quality.

And it's [more than shade trees](#) that are helping fight climate change. The trust says parks can help mitigate coastal flooding, capture carbon, and foster a sense of community among those that will be affected by extreme weather.

Cooling down islands of heat

All of the dark-gray asphalt in cities collect heat—a lot of it. A 2018 study by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration mapped the [hottest areas of Washington, D.C.](#) and found that intense heat nearly always aligned with the densest urban areas. Large parks cooled certain parts of the city by as much as 17 degrees Fahrenheit. That kind of cooling can be a lifesaver given the [more than 600 annual deaths](#) caused by heat-related illnesses.

[Dallas is one of the country's fastest-warming cities](#) thanks in part to its sprawling, impervious surfaces, but with a new \$312 million bond package, the city is hoping to change that.

“A lot of people see Texas as very conservative but there's no denying that climate change is real, and our cities understand that,” says Dallas Park and Recreation President Robert Abtahi. “Our parks are taking on that big challenge in the ways we can the best.”

Using satellite data, the city is able to see what neighborhoods most need the [cooling effect of green spaces](#). Parks like the planned [Dallas Water Gardens](#) will be situated in some of the most heat-stressed parts of the city.

Mopping up floods

Cities are increasingly being [inundated with floodwaters](#), and city planners think parks can help with this issue too.

[A report published in February](#) by The Nature Conservancy looked at the best ways to mitigate flooding in Houston, a city with many neighborhoods built on floodplains and regularly inundated by rising waters. Offering affected homeowners buyouts and converting homes into green spaces would save more money than installing infrastructure like pipes, they found.

The coastal city has projects under way to create more than [150 miles of trails, parks, and green spaces](#) along the many bayous running through its urban landscape.

While Houston received a wakeup call from [Hurricane Harvey](#) in 2017, it was [Hurricane Sandy's 2012 strike](#) along the Northeast coast that forced cities to reconcile their new realities.

New York City is [building a patchwork of waterfront parks](#) designed to absorb the energy of incoming water and to drain deluges of rainwater. Atlanta, after repeatedly being hit by flash floods, is creating a [16-acre park designed to absorb millions of gallons of water](#).

In Boston, Parks and Recreation Commissioner Christopher Cook says the city is preparing to see 40 inches of sea level rise by 2050.

“Parks are playing an outsized role in the adaptation plan,” he says, but emphasizes that the city doesn’t see urban parks as a solution to stop or reverse climate change. For that, he touts instead [Boston’s plan to become carbon neutral](#) over the next 30 years.

One piece of the puzzle

Brendan Shane, the climate program director at the Trust for Public Land, says parks can ultimately provide a sort of social resilience, in addition to cooling neighborhoods and absorbing floodwater.

“The stronger the bonds are from neighbor to neighbor, the better they are able to react to a shock,” he says. “The nice thing about parks is they give you all those things at the same time.”

While drainage pipes and reservoirs have also been used to curb some of the impacts of rising seas, the trust and city planners see parks as a way to adapt while providing a better quality of life. It’s not only about making green space, they say, but also about creating opportunities for people to exercise and play.

“Not a single solution by itself will avoid the climate crisis. We see parks as an important part of it, but there isn’t a silver bullet,” says Regas.

She adds: “Parks are an example of what we in the environmental [advocacy] community need to do to embrace solutions that simultaneously address climate change and make people’s lives better.”

Seasonal Passes To Remain Closed Through Memorial Day

[05/22/2019 8:39 am PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

Sonora, CA — In case you were holding out hope that the regional mountain passes will open this weekend, Caltrans confirms it will not happen.

Caltrans reports that crews have been working since the beginning of April to clear the passes, but new storms over recent days have forced the diversion of equipment to lower elevations to plow new snow.

Teams are now running two shifts per day in order to fast-track snow removal. While much of the snow has been removed, there is more precipitation in the forecast, which could create new traffic hazards. In addition, Caltrans must assess the roads and determine if there is any damage.

The snowpack over the winter was around 161-percent of normal. Because of the high snow drifts, up to 25 ft. at the higher elevations, it has been slow to remove. While most days a crew is able to clear about ½ mile, this year it was as little as 1/10 of a mile at times.

If you are wondering when the passes will reopen, Caltrans states, “The estimated time of opening is dependent on the progress to remove remaining snow from the routes and the completion of any repairs needed to fix damage to the roadway, guardrail, culverts, drains and signs, due to damage from rockfall, trees, snow and ice.”

Caltrans oversees Highway 108 Sonora Pass and Highway 4 Ebbetts Pass, while Yosemite National Park oversees Highway 120 Tioga Pass. Yosemite also confirms that Tioga will remain closed through the upcoming weekend with no announced opening date.

Wildfire Preparedness In Calaveras County

[05/22/2019 12:08 pm PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

West Point, CA — CAL Fire, and other agencies, will host a series of open houses over the next few weekends where community members can stop by and talk about fire safety and evacuation preparedness.

The events are being put on in cooperation with the Calaveras County Office of Emergency Services, the Calaveras Sheriff’s Office, and various local fire agencies.

Open houses will be held this Saturday at the CAL Fire West Point station, the following Saturday, June 1, in Altaville, and Saturday, June 8, at the Arnold station. All of the open houses will run from 1-4pm. The open houses are designed to prepare residents about what do in the event of a wildfire, and how to prepare your home and property ahead of time.

CPUD ratepayers faced with 40% increase; district prioritizing infrastructure upgrades

By Davis Harper / Calaveras Enterprise / May 22, 2019

The Calaveras Public Utility District (CPUD) hosted a public information meeting at the Mokelumne Town Hall Tuesday to discuss its proposed five-year plan to fund operations and capital replacements.

The proposal is to increase both base and usage rates by approximately 40% in the first year, and by about 70% of the current rate by July of 2023.

Ratepayers fund the expenses of operating, maintaining and improving the water system, which provides service to approximately 4,500 customers.

The last set of rate increases ended in 2016, yet system costs have been increasing each year due to inflation and maintenance expenses associated with an aging system, modernizing system components and meeting federal and state mandates for water quality testing and treatment, according to a pamphlet provided by CPUD.

At the meeting, district staff had corroded steel pipes on a display table to demonstrate the need for infrastructural upgrades.

“This came out of Highway 26 at Prindle Road,” Water Systems Superintendent Bret Beaudreau said, holding up a piece of pipe coated with an orange film and a flaking black petroleum tar. It’s part of a system of steel pipes in San Andreas and Mokelumne Hill that were installed in the 1940s. “It was leaking at 5 gallons per minute. Every steel pipe (in the district) looks like that. It reduces the water quality and reduces fire flow, so god forbid a structure is on fire, not only is this undersized at four inches, but that reduces the smoothness of the pipe and the internal diameter. It’s all bad.”

The replacement would be C900 PVC piping, Beaudreau said, holding up a thick blue plastic pipe.

“This is industry standard,” he said. “This has a very smooth interior; it’s not going to corrode. It will last over 100 years; it’s an excellent product. In today’s world, this is the best available technology.”

The plan also includes an upgrade on the district’s computer system, which was built in 1972, the same time the plant was constructed.

“The problem with the Eurotherm is it is only a data recorder and has very little brain strength,” Beaudreau said of the current software. “It’s clunky, like an old PC, only has so much memory, freezes up.”

If the funding is provided, that system would be replaced by a “programmable logic controller” – another industry standard for water and wastewater that would allow the operator to operate the plant remotely and help with data collecting to meet regulatory requirements, Beaudreau said.

Gary Ghio of Weber, Ghio & Associates, the district engineer, gave a presentation on the Water Rate Cost of Service Study.

The presentation began with a detailed look at the district’s audited finances from the past four years, which show that CPUD has been operating at a loss since 2015/2016.

“Without a rate increase, this is the type of loss the district is looking at; last year, almost a \$900,000 loss,” Ghio said. “This year we will continue in the red.”

The event drew a chatty crowd.

Mokelumne Hill homeowner Mike Strobel said he would be protesting the rate increases, arguing that the district’s minimum usage charge was already too expensive.

“I’m against the rate hike. I’m on a fixed income,” Strobel told the Enterprise at the meeting. “We’re two people on Mi Wuk Trail. We use 3,000 gallons a month, but they charge me for 5,000 (the minimum). Let’s bank it and roll it over into the next month. That would be fair. That way I can save some of my water.”

Chat Soule, a Mokelumne Hill resident of 40 years, said what the district is requesting seems “acceptable” based on infrastructural needs, but that he wants more information on exactly how the money will be spent.

“Over the projected five years they’re going to need that money for infrastructure. Our water lines are old,” Soule said. “Do I want to pay more? No, like anybody else, (but) it’s expensive operating this equipment, and replacement has to be done. I hesitate to jump up right now and say ‘Yeah this is what they need.’ I want to know what they want to do with the money. I would like to see something a little more definite.”

District Manager Donna Leatherman said CPUD has been pursuing grant funding for future improvements that, if secured, could potentially forego rate increases laid out in the five-year plan, based on what the board decides.

“At this point, we have to set the stage to be ready for the work we need to do for all of the capital improvements,” Leatherman told the Enterprise. “We’re hoping to get those grants, but until we have those stamped and sealed, we can’t say we’re not going to do a rate increase in any of those five years at this point.”

CPUD will soon be sending out a survey to gauge the Median Household Income (MHI) for the district. According to a survey from 2017, the MHI for the area was \$54,792, which is not considered to be disadvantaged, according to the State Water Board.

Leatherman thinks the actual number is lower, which could make the district eligible for grant funding.

As far as setting lower minimum water usage rates for homeowners that aren’t using all 5,000 of their monthly allotted gallons, “I foresee that coming in the next round of rate increases,” Leatherman said. That will depend on how the district adapts to future state regulations on water usage monitoring. “When we have a better study of the water usage and the states tells us what we can and can’t have, (new minimums may be discussed).”

CPUD will hold another meeting at the San Andreas Town Hall, 24 Church Hill Road, San Andreas on Thursday.

Homeowners are invited to provide written comments, but were specifically informed at the Tuesday meeting that no verbal commentary would be allowed until the public hearing on June 11 at the San Andreas Town Hall at 7 p.m.

Unless 50% of ratepayers submit written protests by that date, the board will hold a public hearing and vote on whether to advance the plan.

If adopted, the new rates will go into effect immediately, and will be reflected in the billing cycle beginning July 26.

Unemployment Rates In Tuolumne And Calaveras Counties

[05/23/2019 9:43 am PST](#)

BJ Hansen, MML News Director

Sonora, CA — When comparing the unemployment rate to the state average, Tuolumne County is slightly higher, and Calaveras County is just below.

The California Employment Development Department reports that the state's jobless rate for April was 4.3-percent, unchanged from March. Tuolumne County was 4.6-percent and Calaveras County was 3.8-percent. Statewide, education and health services had the largest growth, adding 17,300 jobs. Leisure and hospitality also increased, with 12,100 new jobs. Sectors that posted the largest declines include information services and logging and mining.

The US unemployment rate is lower than the state, and came in at 3.6-percent.

Activists sue Trump administration for not protecting imperiled Sierra Nevada red foxes

Guy MacCarthy / Union Democrat / May 23, 2019

In a 15-page filing Thursday in federal district court in San Francisco, attorneys for the Center for Biological Diversity and San Francisco Baykeeper sued the Trump administration for failing to protect the Sierra Nevada red fox and seven other at-risk species across the nation, under the Endangered Species Act.

Four years ago, biologists in Yosemite touted two sightings of Sierra Nevada red fox in the far north section of the national park in December 2014 and January 2015, and they said it was the first time Sierra Nevada red foxes were spotted inside the park in nearly a century.

Biologists have been trying to learn if the rare carnivore is related to others documented in recent years in the Sonora Pass area.

"The Sierra Nevada red fox of California is one of the rarest mammals in North America, likely consisting of fewer than 50 individuals," National Park Service officials said in January 2015.

The nearest verified previous occurrences of Sierra Nevada red foxes were in the Sonora Pass area, north of the park, where biologists from UC Davis, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Forest Service were monitoring a small Sierra Nevada red fox population, first documented by the Forest Service in 2010, park service officials said.

In their court filing Thursday, lawyers for the Center for Biological Diversity and San Francisco Baykeeper said protection for the Sierra Nevada red fox is warranted because research shows their population has been reduced to approximately 29 adults, including an estimated 14 breeding individuals.

Such a small population could be wiped out by population-level threats including adverse genetic effects of inbreeding, climate change, or chance events such as storms or local disease outbreaks.

Sierra Nevada red foxes have declined due to habitat destruction through logging, grazing, road building and fire suppression, Jeff Miller with the Center for Biological Diversity said Thursday. They are also vulnerable to poaching, poisoning, trapping, and disturbance by off-road and snow vehicles. Climate change is projected to dramatically shrink the fox's habitat as warming pushes it farther up mountain slopes.

Endangered Species Act listing for Sierra Nevada red foxes would protect their habitat, require federal agencies to consult on and limit activities harmful to foxes, and would spur recovery planning efforts, Miller said.

David Bernhardt, the Interior secretary, and Margaret Everson, the acting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service director, are named as defendants in the filing. Communications staff with the Interior Department forwarded questions to Fish and Wildlife staff and Department of Justice staff, who did not respond in time for publication.

According to Center for Biological Diversity advocates, the Trump administration has listed the fewest species for protection in its first two years since the Reagan administration. The Obama administration listed 72 species and the Clinton administration listed 196 species during their

first two years. The Trump administration has listed 17 species under the Endangered Species Act.

Right now there are more than 500 species awaiting protection decisions by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. United Nations scientists released a report earlier this month finding as many as one million species are at risk of extinction.

According to conservation advocates, the federal Fish and Wildlife Service has already determined the Sierra Nevada red fox and seven other species -- longfin smelt, Hermes copper butterfly, red tree vole, eastern gopher tortoise, Berry Cave salamander, Puerto Rico harlequin butterfly, and a large flowering shrub called marrón bacora -- all warrant endangered species protections. But the agency has failed to provide that protection.

Under the Endangered Species Act, the agency can delay protection for species if it is making expeditious progress listing other species, and that is not the case, staff with the Center for Biological Diversity and San Francisco Baykeeper said.

The advocacy groups are asking federal court to issue an order declaring Bernhardt and Everson are unlawfully depriving the eight species of protection under the Endangered Species Act, and order them to publish proposed rules for the eight species.

Barriers to mitigating tree mortality on private, BLM, Forest Service land

[By Davis Harper](#) / Calaveras Enterprise / May 23, 2019

Tree mortality continues to plague Calaveras County at an unprecedented rate, even after three consecutive wet winters and thousands of hazardous tree removals countywide.

More than 5,000 dead and dying trees have been removed on private and Forest Service parcels under the Calaveras County Tree Removal Program, which kicked off in late 2017.

Four projects in the Sheep Ranch, Wilseyville, West Point and Murphys areas are currently near completion, and the work will continue in the Blue Lake Springs and Arnold area along the Highway 4 corridor in the coming months. Right-of-entry forms (RoEs) have recently been sent to property owners in Big Trees Village.

“The county and its tree mortality program managers are very appreciative that property owners have permitted this important work to occur on their land,” said Richard Harris, the program’s manager.

Despite seemingly promising numbers, the program has been less than a smooth operation; more than 1,000 homeowners have failed to return RoEs to allow tree removal crews access to their properties.

About 40% of the 2,600-plus RoEs that have been sent out across the county have not been returned, leaving at least 2,000 dead trees threatening county roads and private property, by Harris' estimation.

Under the program, county-hired contractors are overseen by foresters who ensure that private property protections are being met, Harris said. For owners that have to meet defensible space requirements, tree removal crews must ensure that no debris from operations is left within 100 feet of any habitable dwelling. All logs and debris that can be feasibly removed without "unacceptable environmental damage" are removed by contractors, unless property owners request that logs be left on their properties.

The county encourages owners who receive these forms to return them as soon as possible so that project planning can go forward, and aims to complete the second round of projects over the next year if weather permits. The removals are a free service to landowners.

TSS Consultants was hired by the county in late 2017 to plan and supervise the projects on a \$1.5 million budget through October of 2019, County Administrative Officer Al Alt told the Enterprise on May 17. The logging companies contracted for the work include Nate's Tree Service, Ace Tree Service, Joe's Logging, Danverse and Sullivan Logging.

With the help of TSS, the county will seek full reimbursement for expenditures on the tree mortality projects from the state Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire). He added that the county has opportunities to extend the contract with TSS if need be.

BLM land roadblocks

The program also covers tree removals on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) parcels, but the county has had little success in getting the agency's approval for much of the work due to a lack of personnel at the BLM Mother Lode field office.

Harris estimated that a few hundred hazardous trees on BLM parcels still need to be removed.

"We really want to get those trees down, especially up in the West Point area; lots of dead trees sandwiched between private parcels (and BLM land)," Harris said.

While state funding is pouring in for wildfire reduction and tree mortality projects on BLM land, the local office is severely understaffed, District 2 Supervisor Jack Garamendi told the Enterprise Monday.

On an April trip to the bureau's office in Washington, D.C., Garamendi requested that the agency provide additional staffing to the local office. He also sought reimbursement for \$300,000 worth of post-Butte Fire emergency tree removals on BLM land.

"We've had good relationships working with local staff," Garamendi said. "The challenge has been their lack of resources ... Just to get (environmental) surveys signed off they need personnel in their office. One forester can only cover so much ground in one day."

Under the county's tree mortality program, the county is responsible for contracting the survey work to comply with local, state and federal standards. Once completed, those surveys are reviewed by BLM staff.

Managing over 230,000 acres of public land across nine counties, the BLM Mother Lode field office review process consists of a field manager and one adviser for each resource (depending on individual project needs) – one archaeologist, one botanist, one forester, one recreation planner, one realty specialist and one wildlife biologist, according to Monte Kawahara, the unit forester for the office.

After surveys are approved by resource specialists and, subsequently, by one fire management officer that is shared between two field offices, the field manager, Elizabeth Meyer-Shields, is in charge of rubber-stamping the action.

The next phase is a public comment period to "allow local residents, organizations and businesses to have a say in the matter if they could be affected by the action," Kawahara said.

In a phone interview Tuesday, Meyer-Shields said a new hazard removal and vegetation management programmatic environmental assessment (EA) that was released in February may help streamline the process for these kinds of projects.

"The big issue for us is looking at different ways we can streamline the process," Meyer-Shields said. "The (programmatic EA) will give us some new tools to try to streamline the process some more, and we're looking at the best way to use those tools right now."

An ongoing issue

Between 2010 and 2017, the number of dead and dying trees in Calaveras County jumped from 8,000 to nearly 3.3 million, according to data collected by the state tree mortality task force, a collaboration among state and federal agencies, local governments, utilities and various stakeholders.

Even with recent wet winters, tree mortality will remain a pressing issue as long as bark beetle infestations and drought conditions continue, said Brady McElroy, a hazard tree specialist in the Calaveras Ranger District of the Stanislaus National Forest.

"By no means is the issue going away," McElroy said. "What the Forest Service has to focus on are the high priority areas, the immediate hazards to homes, roads and highways."

In the long-term, McElroy said the Forest Service hopes to increase the pace and scale of thinning projects to restore overstocked forests that have been allowed for by a century of fire suppression.

“Our forests are overstocked, which increases competition (and) stressors on the trees, (and consequently) their ability to defend against bark beetle,” McElroy said. “The ongoing goal is to thin forests to a healthy kind of pre-European settlement stand to where they’re a little more resilient. We’re focusing on high-priority areas in the wildland-urban interface ... We know what happens when these overstocked forests catch fire – we lose them.”

Diana Fredlund, a public affairs officer with the Stanislaus National Forest, said that although federal budget decreases have impacted the scale of the work for the Forest Service, the agency has been able to collaborate with private, county, state and other federal agencies and contractors for tree removal projects.

“We do what we can with what we have,” Fredlund said.

The Forest Service offers its own tree mortality program for homeowners with properties adjacent to Forest Service land. Property owners can fill out a Hazard Tree Evaluation Request Form to be considered for hazard tree abatement.

Forms are available at bit.ly/2Juh2pc or at the Visitor Information Desk in each ranger district.

For more information, call the Calaveras Ranger District at 795-1381.
