

# Weekly ReCAP for July 19, 2019

---

**Next CPC meeting 4:30 to 6:30 pm, August 5, 2019, at the Volunteer Center, 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.

---

**BOS Public Hearing for Final General Plan Update , proposed dates July 30 & 31. Stay tuned for any update.**

---

## Important Notice:

Date: July 11, 2019 at 11:42 AM

### **Subject: 8.06 Revision**

I wanted to personally reach out and invite you to review the new proposed revision of 8.06. We would love to hear any questions, comments, concerns, suggestions you may have. The draft as well as the current ordinance can be found at:

<https://codecompliance.calaverasgov.us/>

And your comments can be sent to:

[codecompweb@co.calaveras.ca.us](mailto:codecompweb@co.calaveras.ca.us)

**Sabrina Cable**

**Senior Code Enforcement Officer**

**(209)754-6326**

scable@co.calaveras.ca.us

---

From CPC member Foothill Conservancy:

***Celebrate the Wild and Scenic Mokelumne with  
a raft trip! Trips at 11:00 am or 3:00 pm on Sunday, July  
28, 2019.***

O.A.R.S. will run guided trips on the Mokelumne's 5.5-mile  
Electra-Middle Bar Run south of Jackson.

Tickets are \$75. This year, we're offering a special for those wanting to  
become new members of Foothill Conservancy. For \$100 you can get  
the raft trip for just \$60 and a new individual membership for \$40.

Advance reservations are required.

For more information go to our [website](#).

You can purchase tickets below, email [Carolyn](#) or call 209-223-3508

**Proceeds benefit Foothill Conservancy**

---

**RCRC- The Barbed Wire for July 12, 2019**

**[California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Unveils Statewide  
Vegetation Treatment Program](#)**

A 45-day public comment period is open for the California Department of Forestry and Fire  
Protection's (CAL FIRE's) proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) and  
it's Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). This broad based initiative is designed to

expand the pace and scale of CAL FIRE's vegetation treatment targets in State Responsibility Areas (SRAs) to 250,000 acres per year by streamlining CEQA review.

This is one of the state's multi-pronged solutions to respond to the wildfire crisis in the Wildland-Urban Interface and focuses on protecting natural resources, reducing risk to lives and property, and reducing fire suppression costs when responding to a wildfire.

Additional information on CAL FIRE's plan can be accessed [here](#). Written comments to CAL FIRE must be received no later than Friday, August 9, 2019.

### **Cannabis Banking Update**

In a change of course this week, Senate Banking Committee Chairman Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) said he would hold a hearing on the cannabis banking legislation known as the SAFE Banking Act in the near future. Chairman Crapo has resisted a hearing on cannabis banking, arguing instead the issue should be addressed in the Senate Judiciary Committee through federal legalization.

In April, Senator Crapo stated "as long as cannabis is illegal under federal law, it seems to me to be difficult for us to resolve this." Chairman Crapo expressed a change of heart this week in an interview with *American Banker* where he said he is "looking into" cannabis banking and that a hearing could be held "relatively soon."

Some reports suggest the Senate Banking Committee could schedule a hearing before the August recess. Chairman Crapo's reversal is the latest sign of momentum behind the advocacy push to resolve the cannabis banking issue that prevents banks from providing financial services to cannabis related businesses. The Chairman's interview with *American Banker* was released a day after the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security held a hearing on "Marijuana Laws in America: Racial Justice and the Need for Reform." The hearing addressed the issue of marijuana reform more generally, but several members highlighted the prohibition on cannabis banking. There was bipartisan consensus throughout the hearing that Congress should enact legislation to resolve the conflict between state and federal cannabis regulation but members remain divided on the best path forward. Progressive Democrats are arguing for comprehensive reforms that legalize cannabis at the federal level, support minority owners of marijuana businesses, and reduce penalties for criminals with marijuana convictions.

In general, Republicans are more supportive of the SAFE Banking Act and the STATES Act, a bill that would grant states autonomy to impose their own cannabis policy.

### **Rural Broadband Update**

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Ajit Pai is expected to introduce a regulatory order in August that would require more reporting data from broadband carriers to increase the accuracy of the national broadband coverage map. Over the last several months, the FCC has faced scrutiny over the accuracy of the national broadband map, which is used by federal agencies to determine areas that lack reliable broadband coverage.

Democrats and Republicans have criticized the FCC for relying on data reported by nationwide carriers that appears to overstate the availability of internet access in some areas.

The House Agriculture Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit held a hearing this week on “Building Opportunity in Rural America through Affordable, Reliable and High-Speed Broadband.” During his opening remarks, Subcommittee Chairman David Scott (D-Georgia) urged FCC Chairman Pai to allow stakeholders from rural America to play a role in the rulemaking process. The FCC is scheduled to invest billions of dollars in rural broadband over the next several years and Chairman Scott suggested rural areas should be involved in the process.

### **Bill of the Week: Senate Bill 182 (Jackson) – Planning and Zoning: Wildfires**

RCRC has lent its support to Senate Bill 182, authored by Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson (D-Santa Barbara). SB 182 establishes wildfire reduction standards and planning requirements for new housing developments in Very High Fire Risk Areas (VHFRA) of the state.

Specifically, SB 182 prohibits local governments from approving permits for housing developments unless the project is in compliance with the wildfire risk reduction standards as outlined in the bill. SB 182 also requires increased wildfire risk mitigation planning by local governments through updated local safety and land use elements of that jurisdiction’s general plan. Additionally, in order to reduce development pressures in the VHFRA through the Regional Housing Needs Allocation process, SB 182 requires a lower proportion of state housing allocation to jurisdictions that meet specified conditions.

RCRC’s support letter can be accessed [here](#). SB 182 passed out of the Assembly Local Government Committee and awaits consideration in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. For more information, Tracy Rhine, RCRC Legislative Advocate, can be reached at (916) 447-4806 or [trhine@rcrcnet.org](mailto:trhine@rcrcnet.org).

---

## **Newsom Taps One Regulator and Fires Another**

**By Tracey Petersen / MML / Jul 12, 2019**

Sacramento, CA – As Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law his \$21 billion fire fund today, he also announced the appointment of a new utilities regulator, after just yesterday ousting another supervisor.

Newsom says he fired the head of the state’s oil and gas division because he did not “exercise consistency” with his opposition to hydraulic fracturing. He added that Supervisor Ken Harris was let go based on two issues: an increase in state-issued fracking permits and a report from anti-fracking groups showing senior officials in the division held stock in companies they were

responsible for regulating. While he does not have the authority to issue a moratorium on fracking, Newsom clarified that he wants to move the state away from reliance on oil and gas.

A day after the state legislature passed the fire fund bill; Newsom signed the measure that creates a fund of up to \$21 billion to pay victims of the state's devastating wildfires, as earlier detailed [here](#), and chose a new utilities regulator.

His choice for the new president of the California Public Utilities Commission, which oversees power companies as well as other services, is 64-year-old Marybel Batjer of Sacramento. She has served as Secretary of the Government Operations Agency since 2013 and was also the Cabinet Secretary for Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger from 2003 to 2005. The commission is in the spotlight as the state's largest electric utility, Pacific Gas & Electric, proceeds with its bankruptcy process after facing billions in claims for damages from wildfires sparked by its equipment.

---

## Heavy Snow Keeps High Country Roads Closed

By [Tracey Petersen](#) / MML / **Jul 13, 2019!**

Sonora, CA – This winter's deep snow, while melting, is still hampering high country road cleanup in the Stanislaus National Forest.

Travel remains hazardous, forcing Forest Supervisor Jason Kuiken to extend a road closure order through July 31st or until conditions allow the roads to reopen. Cooler temperatures have delayed the spring melt says Mi-Wok and Summit District Ranger Sarah LaPlante, who adds, "It's been a long time since our roads have remained impassible due to snow this late. Our maintenance teams are finding conditions improving, but there was a lot of snow up there. We ask visitors to be patient and know we are opening roads and facilities as quickly as we can."

Forest officials note that allowing vehicles on roadways would also damage the infrastructure and paved surfaces, which could result in increased sedimentation in Eagle and Herring Creeks and other area drainages.

Forest officials provided this list of roads that remain closed, click [here](#) for road updates:

- Forest Road No. 4N12 (Herring Creek Road) from its intersection with 18EV463
  - Forest Road No. 5N0 I (Eagle Meadow Road) from its intersection with 5N01S
  - Forest Road No. 4N34 (Gooseberry Road)
  - Forest Road No. 4N47
  - \_\_\_\_\_
-

# Tuolumne County Takes Early Action To Address Homelessness

By [B.J. Hansen](#) / MML / Jul 16, 2019

Sonora, CA — The Tuolumne County Supervisors approved a formal “County Plan to Combat Homelessness,” which is a requirement to receive a new “No Place Like Home” state grant of \$500,000.

It is noted that the latest ATCAA point in time (PIT) homeless count, conducted in January, found there are at least 418 people living homeless in the county. Of the over 300 that are unsheltered, 209 are living in camps, 73 in vehicles and 16 in abandoned buildings.

The county’s plan identifies challenges and top priorities. They include the need for more affordable housing, inadequate shelter options, a lack of agencies and services, a lack of funding, a lack of employment opportunities, transportation challenges and a lack of coordination among providers.

It was noted that \$500,000 in state grant funding is a small amount of money in the big picture, but the revenue could be used to help with financing or tax credits for projects in development. For example, the county is working with Visionary Home Builders, a nonprofit affording housing developer in Stockton, regarding a site in Jamestown near the Oak Hills Apartments. The group hopes to construct a 65-unit affordable housing project. Also, the Stanislaus Housing Authority has purchased a 10-unit apartment complex on Hospital Road in Sonora, and has also purchased a 3.3 acre Caltrans property on Peaceful Valley Road, with the intention of developing affordable units.

The county approved the plan, allowing for the acceptance of state funding, with a 4-0 vote (board chair Karl Rodefer was absent). How to spend the money, and which projects could benefit, will be determined at future meetings.

---

## Where Do We Get Our Water?

By **Rebecca Miller-Cripps, UCCE Master Gardener** / MML / Jul 17, 2019

For most of us who live in Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties, the essential link to our water supply is the Stanislaus River (“The Stan”). Creeks that drain melting run-off from Sierra snowpack feed the Stanislaus River and are impounded in reservoirs ranging from Union and Utica in the north to Spicer and Donnell, Pinecrest and Lyons, and Phoenix Lake and Lake Tulloch farther south and west. Eventually, the multiple branches of the Stanislaus find their way to New Melones Reservoir, operated by the United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation. From there the Stanislaus eventually joins the San Joaquin River and flows out to San Francisco Bay, mingling with waters from the Sacramento River flowing down from the north. In addition, rivers that supply water to Calaveras and Tuolumne Counties include the Mokelumne in the north and the Tuolumne, originating in Yosemite National Park, to the south.

The ditch system, which flows for 71 miles in Tuolumne County, brings water from Pinecrest Lake (fed by the South Fork of the Stanislaus River) to Lyons Reservoir and then on to communities ranging from Twain Harte to Jamestown. For more information, see <https://tudwater.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Understanding-Your-Water-> “TUD has a contract with PG&E (Pacific Gas and Electric Company) which provides for perpetual water supply for TUD from the South Fork Stanislaus River. This water is stored in Pinecrest Lake, Lyons Reservoir, Phoenix Lake and other small reservoirs on the TUD ditch system. PG&E owns Lyons Reservoir and the 15.7-mile Main Canal that leads to its Phoenix powerhouse. From the Tuolumne Main Canal, TUD’s water splits into three branches – one serves Twain Harte, Soulsbyville and Tuolumne; and another feeds TUD’s network of ditches, pipelines and treatment plants that serve Crystal Falls, Big Hill and Columbia. The remainder goes into Phoenix Reservoir to serve Phoenix Lake, East Sonora, Sonora and Jamestown.” \*

But, it’s not just Tuolumne Utilities District. There are over 125 separate water companies in Tuolumne County alone! In Calaveras County, the situation is very similar. The largest water utility is Calaveras County Water District; However, many other water utilities exist including City of Angels, Valley Springs Public Utility District, Union Public Utility District, Calaveras Public Utility District, and others.

All of these water providers rely on the Sierra Nevada snowpack in our two-county area. Much of that snowpack is drained by the hard-working, ever-flowing, many-branched Stanislaus River. May we be cognizant of and protective of this vast and complex system that provides such a life-sustaining service!

\*Sources include: Tuolumne Utilities District website: <https://tudwater.com/about-us/> and Calaveras County Water District website: <https://ccwd.org/about/>

Rebecca Miller-Cripps is a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Tuolumne County.

UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: [http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardeners/](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/) You can also find us on Facebook. For more helpful Master Gardener articles view our [archive here](#) located in the Real Estate Section with other home improvement, home finance and other informative real estate articles [updated weekly here](#).

---

## Supervisors Approve Citizens Advisory Fire Committee

By [B.J. Hansen](#) / MML / Jul 17, 2019

Sonora, CA — Citing the need to engage the public in the effort to make Tuolumne County more fire resilient, seven members were appointed to a new volunteer committee.

There are seats for representatives from each of the five supervisor districts, and two at-large positions. They will collectively provide input to the board of supervisors and help with fire related initiatives.

The supervisors received around 20 applications for the committee, and each supervisor picked a person to represent their district. From District One, it will be retired CAL Fire Battalion Chief Scott Fremd, from District Two, Marvin Keshner, a solar industry consultant, from District Three, Carol Hallet, a Twain Harte CERT team leader, from District Four, Ralph Richards, a longtime firefighter and from District Five, Jerry Tannhauser, a leader with the Highway 108 FireSafe Council.

Immediately after, the board selected Kevin Anderson, a Sonora Planning Commissioner, and Wesley Brineger, a local forester, to fill the at-large seats.

Speaking about challenges ahead, Supervisor Sherri Brennan noted, “This is a large mountain we have to climb (fire danger). We didn’t get here in the last year. It has taken us decades to get here, and it is going to take us some time, and a lot of energy, to get out of it.”

The committee members will serve a two-year term.

---

## **Calaveras County’s New Chief Exec Delivers Initial Assessment**

[By \*\*Tori James\*\*](#) / MML / Jul 17, 2019

San Andreas, CA – After weighing in with the supervisors about his first 90 days in office, Calaveras County’s new chief executive shares more thoughts with Clarke Broadcasting.

Hired back in mid-April, Dr. Albert Alt, who already resided locally in Valley Springs and left his position of vice president of administrative services at Modesto Junior College, took over for interim CAO Manuel Lopez.

At this week’s supervisors’ meeting, Alt presented his findings following his three-month initial assessment while on the job. Among the strengths of county department heads, Alt noted resilient and resourceful employees with a sense of community and pride for serving the county.

He shares with Clarke Broadcasting, “The employees here have been positive about me coming in and not necessarily about me but about my message: that I live in the county and I want to be here long-term. The county needs long-term leadership because that is what it takes to provide stability for any organization.”



Alt points out that Calaveras County has had eight CAOs in ten years. “Whenever you have that much change in leadership, it makes it difficult for staff and management to be able to get things done.” While he identified a few weaknesses, including accountability, he was quick to point out that it is not necessarily about internal issues but having a lack of a consistent message from a CAO.

### **Aging Facilities An Achilles Heel**

“For us internally...I think, right now at the 90-day point, our biggest unfunded liability is that we have such aged facilities that we need a significant investment...and that is always a challenge when you are asking taxpayers to help improve or update our facilities when there are so many programmatic needs that our public has as well,” Alt confides.

While similar issues often exist for K-12 schools and community colleges, he points out it is much easier for those public entities to get broad support for general obligation bonds. “New mechanical systems or HVAC units [for public buildings] are typically not as exciting as building new schools, which leaves us to fund our facilities out of general revenues, and that creates a resource challenge,” he says wryly. Noting several immediate deferred maintenance needs at the county government campus, he states, “At the end of the day, if we do not become proactive about where we are at with these really aged facilities, we will spend more tax dollars on emergency repairs.”

As far as his goals, he comments, “We have some very distinct objectives that we will bring back regarding facilities, employee engagement, revenue, and stability.” Alt shares high praise for the board, which he describes as very well-read and tracking well in dealing with its set priorities, including the General Plan update, how to utilize the PG&E Butte fire settlement funds, and addressing the draft cannabis regulatory ordinance.

Getting further into the year, Alt anticipates the supervisors will move back into budget discussions, and that before the end of the year, the topic of Lake Tulloch and related issues from a county standpoint will get some limelight. “[It is about] dealing with Lake Tulloch and how our county interacts with the GPA [Tri-Dam Project Partners] that runs it...the nuances of having the lake divided between the two counties and how the lake impacts land use and calls for public safety,” he explains.

“Between all three of us, it is just necessary to sit down and talk about how we align the work, make sure there is uniformity for marine and public safety response,” Alt continues. “How docks and or land use on county lands affect either water quality, or how water issues affect our land use — it is a pretty complex dynamic with the different entities that are involved.”

### **On Plotting The Course Ahead**

Asked about his thoughts on how the former board of supervisors and county staff became mired in the cannabis ban ordinance, Alt replies that strategic planning and working to plot the county’s direction over the next three, five or ten years will not be dependent on two or three key policies that will change or evolve through board change.

“This is really focused on the 90 to 95 percent of our workday, which is just the operation of running the county,” he maintains. “Whether it is cannabis or... whatever the next [policy] thing will be, we still have to focus on the work of the county, providing service and creating an efficient government without losing track of that. Any one particular policy or focus of the board should not take us completely off course of where the organization is going.”

With three months under his belt, Alt adds he is particularly excited, becoming acquainted with other leaders across the county, and that there are quite a few new ones in the mix. “Whether they are CAOs to a private sector or a public utility or what, I have heard the same thing — that their organizations potentially lost their way because of turnover in leadership and drama and things like that.”

He enthuses, “If we can take any of our issues that we are experiencing countywide, they probably overlap most of our entities. So, the more we can create cross-sector collaboration, we can point our resources at problems that are not unique to any one of our organizations — and bring a lot of effort to bear on those kinds of challenges.”

Alt describes his end goal, besides being successful at his job, is a higher calling to create a better environment for the next generation. “This is not just about work for me. I live here and am raising my kids here, and when I retire from the county – which I hope is a good number of years from now – I hope that I can look back and know that my work was focused on making stronger, more resilient, more vibrant communities for where my kids are going to grow up.”

---

## **Tuolumne County Leaders Disappointed Following State Insurance Meeting**

**[By B.J. Hansen](#) / MML / Jul 17, 2019**

Sonora, CA — Tuolumne County leaders, as part of a five county regional effort, recently met with the state’s insurance commissioner about the spiking number of homeowner insurance cancellations.

CAO Tracie Riggs was among those that met with commissioner Ricardo Lara, and reported back at yesterday’s supervisors meeting, “Unfortunately it was a rather disappointing meeting.”

Recapping the conversation, she says, “He thinks that we have a healthy insurance market (statewide) and there is not any difficulty with securing insurance, and that if people call him, they can get insurance for anyone.”

Riggs says there are hundreds, if not thousands, who have been impacted locally. Just in the past couple of months, there have been three people in her office who have had policies canceled. It is having an impact on the local economy, as she has heard about local home sales that have fallen through related to insurance, whether it be a delay, spike in cost or inability to receive a policy.

She is encouraging anyone impacted by a cancellation, or notable price increase, to contact the state insurance office. For more information, [click here](#).

Also of note, Supervisor Sherri Brennan also took part in the meeting, and she noted that she is helping to lead a working group on the matter via the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC).

---

## Calaveras Water District Conservation Concerns During PG&E Wildfire Shutoffs

[By Tracey Petersen](#) / MML / Jul 17, 2019

San Andreas, CA – Calaveras County Water District (CCWD) warns its nearly 18,000 customers that if the power is turned off by PG&E for wildfire danger in the county it will impact service.

If the lights go out due to the utility's planned Public Safety Power Shutoff Program (PSPS), as detailed [here](#), the district will need to conserve energy. CCWD officials explain that its water, wastewater, and recycled water systems rely upon uninterrupted electrical power from PG&E. During a power outage, those systems will rely on back-up generators. To help reduce the risk of that equipment possibly failing, customers will be asked to cut down on their water use.

CCWD adds that a PSPS could occur at any time it is critically important for residents on wells and septic tanks to have a back-up plan. CCWD provides these preparations for extended outages tips:

Have an emergency supply of drinking water available.

- During a power outage, minimize water usage to only critical health and safety needs to help CCWD maintain service to its customers and reduce potential backups associated with engineered septic systems (if applicable).
- Plan for medical needs such as medications that may require refrigeration or devices that need power.
- Identify backup charging methods for phones and keep hard copies of emergency numbers.
- Build or restock your emergency kit with flashlights, fresh batteries, first aid supplies, and cash.

Customers are also encouraged to verify their contact information by emailing CCWD customer service at [customerservice@ccwd.org](mailto:customerservice@ccwd.org) or calling (209) 754-3543.

---

## New tree-removal funding found

Enterprise report / Jul 17, 2019

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a federal agency under the Department of Agriculture, has created a cost-share program to fund dead tree removals within 100-foot defensible space zones around habitable structures.

Funded through 2022, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is being implemented through resource conservation districts (RCD) within the 10 high hazard tree mortality counties, including Calaveras.

The RCPP provides technical assistance to people with larger properties (20 to 40 acres) where tree mortality has had a significant impact or where a landowner wants to know more about his or her options for management. Essentially, it covers the total cost of preparing a forest management plan by a registered professional forester that will qualify a landowner for financial assistance through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

In order to qualify, private forest landowners must have at least one dead standing conifer (pine, cedar, spruce, etc.) on their property.

For landowners living in Amador, Calaveras or Tuolumne Counties, the regional forester that will be conducting site visits is Calaveras County Resource Conservation District (CCRCD) Executive Director Gordon Long. He clarified that in addition to full tree removals, the program provides funding for pruning, forest thinning of small live trees, tree planting and herbicide application, among other services.

The cost breakdown between landowners and the federal contribution depends on a few factors, Long said.

The program can pay about \$800 per large dead tree within a 100-foot defensible space zone. If outside that zone, the funding provided is based on acreage. That can run anywhere from \$300 to \$1,000 per acre, depending on slope, proximity to streambeds and other specifics.

Long said interested landowners should apply by August or September at the latest.

“This is a real opportunity for folks with dead trees on their property that they can’t afford to remove,” Richard Harris, Calaveras County Tree Mortality Program manager, said in a July 9 phone interview.

Funding has not been available for landowners for dead tree removals since a Calaveras Foothills Firesafe Council grant program ended in February, he added.

Regarding updates to the county’s tree mortality program, hazardous tree removal projects along county roads were completed in the West Point, Glencoe, Rail Road Flat and Wilseyville areas, in addition to projects on U.S. Forest Service land adjoining county roads. Projects are wrapping up at Big Trees Village, Sky High Ranch, Sherman Acres and Cottage Springs, and new projects are underway or will soon begin west of Highway 49, north of West Point and in the Blue Lake Springs and Arnold areas.

For more information on the NRCS program, landowners should reach out to Long at 791-0286 or [gordon.long@ca.nacdn.net](mailto:gordon.long@ca.nacdn.net).

---

## Groundbreaking kicks off Mill Woods fuel-reduction project

By [Davis Harper davis@calaverasenterprise.com](mailto:davis@calaverasenterprise.com) / Jul 18, 2019

A 30-acre fuel-reduction project in the Mill Woods subdivision northwest of Arnold broke ground on July 11, according to a Mill Woods Firewise Community press release.

In December of 2018, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) awarded the Calaveras County Resources Conservation District (CCRCD) a \$103,000 grant to fund the work through a state program called the California Climate Investments (CCI). The initiative spends billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen the economy and improve public health and the environment, with an emphasis on disadvantaged communities.

The goal is to decrease the fuel load (the amount of flammable vegetation in the area) and create a fuel break protecting the Mill Woods subdivision, central Arnold and other neighboring communities from a large wildfire event. A small section of the Arnold Rim Trail (ART) is included in the project.

Accessible through Manuel Road in Arnold, the perimeter of the 74-acre subdivision is bordered on the north, east and west by the Stanislaus National Forest, and on the south by other homes and lots in the Arnold community, according to a fact sheet provided by Marg Donnelly, a grant writer on the project.

In theory, the practical benefits of a fuel break are to reduce chances for fire ignition, slow the potential spread of a fire and provide first responders extra time for containment. Grant funding covered the costs of environmental reporting, groundwork to include mastication and hand work, project management and contract administration.

Goals laid out in the treatment include masticating underbrush vegetation and small trees, preserving mature dogwood trees, removing “dead, dying, diseased or unsound trees,” masticating and grinding stumps to the ground, pruning up to 12 feet to remove potential ladder fuels and thinning the forest stand to 40% canopy. After these are completed, the masticated biomass will be spread as a mulch over the project area to suppress new growth of understory trees.

Ronwright Logging, a Dorrington-based company, was awarded the contract for the work, and is expected to complete the project in approximately one month.

Because of the danger caused as a byproduct of the heavy machinery, the public is warned to avoid the working area. For the safety of hikers, the ART will be closed between the end of the paved section from the Sierra Nevada Logging Museum and the intersection with the Cedar Center feeder trail.

The project is part of an effort to build fuel breaks around communities from Camp Connell to Murphys along the Highway 4 corridor, with large contributions from Calaveras Big Trees State Park, Sierra Pacific Industries, Stanislaus National Forest and other subdivisions, according to Pete Padelford, the Mill Woods project manager.

Comprised of the communities of Murphys, Forest Meadows, Hathaway Pines, Avery, Arnold, Dorrington and Camp Connell, the Highway 4 area has a history of large and damaging wildfire events, Donnelly said, with reference to the Butte (2015), Armstrong (2004), Sourgrass (2002), Darby (2001) and Old Gulch (1992) fires. The area is home to 8,560 residents, according to 2010 Census data.

Padelford highlighted the importance of the work in the Mill Woods subdivision in particular: within walking distance of the project area, two large propane tanks outside of Ebbetts Pass Gas in Arnold could wipe out the area if ignited by a fire.

Padelford said that the collaboration among various stakeholders, and the state funding pools for fuels-reduction work that have become available over the past two years have expedited fuel break efforts. Additionally, more and more private landowners off Highway 4 are getting on board with these kinds of projects, provided the promise of grant funding, he said.

“We’re getting so much done so much faster,” Padelford said, with reference to the work of the Calaveras-Amador Forestry team in the northeastern part of the county as well.

Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions (CHIPS) just received a grant for a project on Calaveras County Water District land via the efforts of the Calaveras-Amador Forestry Team. They're also planning on applying for a \$2 million-plus grant through CCRCD to start a 600-acre fuel break project east of Murphys in September.

In recent months, SPI has been working on a 500-acre fuel break in the Love Creek area near Blue Lake Springs. Additionally, the company’s proposal for a 433-acre fuel break adjacent to the Big Trees Village subdivision is expected to start in the fall, pending a Cal Fire review, SPI Community Relations Manager Mark Luster confirmed with the Enterprise Monday.

In addition to helping prevent the next massive wildfire, Padelford said he hopes the uptick in fuel-break projects will draw home insurance companies back to the area.

“The Arnold area is a very special place,” Padelford said. “We’ve got to do something to protect this thing as best we can.”

*This story was updated on July 18, 2019 to correct that the Calaveras-Amador Forestry Team was the group that applied for grant funding for a CCWD fuel reduction project, with CHIPS as the fiscal agent.*

---