

WEEKLY ReCAP**DEC. 24, 2020****A Sampling of News and Views**

Have a Merry Safe, Blessed Christmas and a Peaceful New Year!



P.O. Box 935, San Andreas, CA, 95249 • (209) 772-1463

*Protecting our rural environment by promoting citizen participation
in sustainable land use planning since 2006*

The Community Action Project (CAP) administers the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC), which is comprised of regional and local organizations, community groups, and concerned individuals who promote public participation in land use and resource planning to ensure a healthy human, natural, and economic environment now and in the future. Learn more at www.calaverascap.com.

NEXT CALAVERAS PLANNING COALITION MEETING: **January 4, 2021, 3:00 P.M. TO 5:00 P.M. VIA ZOOM**

NEW MEMBERS WELCOME AT CPC MEETINGS

Organizations, groups, and individuals may join the CPC. Prospective members may attend two consecutive meetings before making a final decision on membership in the Coalition. The membership form is a pledge to support and advocate for the Coalition's eleven Land Use and Development Principles, which you will find on our website: www.calaverascap.com. There is no membership fee. However, members are encouraged to donate to the CAP/CPC. Visitors and prospective members will, by necessity, be excluded from attorney/client privileged discussions. If you are interested in membership, please email CPC Facilitator Tom Infusino, tomi@volcano.net, to receive a membership form, agenda, and the Zoom meeting connection.

To help prevent the spread of Covid-19 in our county, all CAP/CPC meetings will be held online via Zoom until restrictions are lifted by the Public Health Department.

from the Calaveras County Planning Department website:

Zoning Update Map Fixed – Review Time Extended

Thank you for your patience while we worked out some glitches with the GIS maps of the proposed zone changes. The southern portion of the County is now included in the map.

Because of the delay in getting all of the information up, we are extending the review period for comments. We ask that you get your comments to the Planning Department by Friday, January 22, 2021.

FYI All,

To view the **proposed rezoning map** (General Plan Update Implementation), visit the Planning Department web page: <https://planning.calaverasgov.us/>, then click on "**Zoning Map Update**" or just click here directly: <https://gisportal.co.calaveras.ca.us/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=ebdd24eb70db4b5494fbdce6427454bc>.

The map and zoning layers are a bit tricky to use. For **Directions**, see the top right of the Planning page under **Zoning>Zoning Map Help** or just click here directly for directions: https://planning.calaverasgov.us/Portals/Planning/Documents/General%20Plan%201996/Zoning%20Help.pdf?ver=Qa2glnCvLb_bIyIq0e1Dfw%3d%3d.

There are approx. 5,000 parcels that have been changed to new zones. Most are in the "interim" (U) zone; the rest are in "inconsistent" zones.

Stay tuned for more zoning map information.

Colleen

Planning department releases proposed zoning map

· [by Noah Berner](#) / The Calaveras Enterprise
· Dec 15, 2020

The Calaveras County Planning Department recently released a proposed zoning map update in order to bring the county's zoning into compliance with the General Plan.

"The purpose of the map changes are to rezone parcels zoned with the interim zones of Unclassified and Highway Service to a zone compatible with the General Plan land-use designations," a press release from the planning department reads.

"This affects approximately 5,000 parcels in the county. Additionally, another 1,100 parcels are proposed for rezoning to make them consistent with the land-use designations."

The interim zones have been in place for "many, many years," and were put in place until permanent zones could be adopted for the sites, Planning Director Peter Maurer said.

"The vast majority of those parcels are probably going to either rural residential, residential agriculture or general agriculture," he said.

An additional 1,100 parcels also need to be rezoned to make them consistent with the General Plan's land-use designations.

"One of the primary implementation tools of the General Plan is its zoning ordinance, which includes a zoning map," Maurer said. "When the land-use designations were changed on some parcels, that meant that we needed to modify the zoning as well to bring it into conformance with the General Plan."

Some of the reasons for rezoning the parcels include encouraging development in areas that have adequate services, limiting the need for travel and greenhouse gas emissions and making communities more economically viable, Maurer said.

The proposed map includes rezoning for about 6,100 parcels, about 13% of the county's 45,000 total parcels.

"It's a relatively small percentage, but it's significant enough," Maurer said. "There will be at least two public hearings before the planning commission and the board before this gets adopted."

The public can view the proposed zoning map by visiting the planning department's website at planning.calaverasgov.us. For directions on viewing the map, [click here](#).

Those with questions and concerns on the proposed zoning map can contact Planning Director Peter Maurer by phone at (209) 754-6394 or by email at pmaurer@co.calaveras.ca.us.

The amendment is expected to be reviewed by the planning commission in January 2021, and comments should be received no later than Jan. 8, 2021.

More People Moving To Mother Lode But Overall Population Declines

By **B.J. Hansen** Published **Dec 17, 2020**

Sonora, CA — In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, many urban areas in California saw more people move out than come in, while the Mother Lode witnessed the opposite trend.

Between July of 2019 to July of 2020, Tuolumne County had a net migration of 59 people, Calaveras County had 11 and Amador County had 63. The figure is the number of people who moved to the county minus the number who moved away. Large counties that saw a negative net migration included Los Angeles (74,072), Orange (17,239), Santa Clara (8,546), Monterey (4,787), Alameda (4,293), Santa Cruz (2,514) and Stanislaus (1,109).

Some other larger counties bucked the trend and saw a net migration increase, like San Francisco (322), Sacramento (6,770) and Fresno (1,022).

Statewide, 135,394 more people moved out of California than moved in.

However, the state's overall population still increased because there were many more births than deaths. In July of last year there were 39,761,195 residents, and this July the number had increased to 39,782,419.

The Mother Lode counties, while having more people come than go, saw an overall decline due to more deaths than births, primarily due to an older population base.

Tuolumne County fell from 55,557 residents last year to 52,353 this year. There were 710 deaths and 447 births. Calaveras County's population dropped from 44,402 to 44,286, Amador from 37,464 to 37,325 and Mariposa from 17,842 to 17,778.

The population figures were tabulated by the California Department of Finance.

<https://www.mymotherlode.com/news/local/1431350/more-people-moving-to-mother-lode-but-overall-population-declines.html>

Supervisors approve use of eminent domain to carry out Wagon Trail project

· [by Noah Berner](#) / The Calaveras Enterprise / Dec. 18, 2020

At a Calaveras County Board of Supervisors meeting on Dec. 8, the board held a public hearing and unanimously approved a resolution of necessity to acquire property interests through eminent domain in order to carry out the State Route 4 Wagon Trail Project.

The Wagon Trail project, which has formally been in the works since 2001, aims to realign and improve a roughly six-mile stretch of Highway 4 between Copperopolis and Angels Camp.

The road has changed little from its original course in the 19th century, when it carried wagons to and from Calaveras County long before the advent of the automobile.

"The narrow width and non-engineered geometry of the roadway, combined with large traffic volumes (5,000 vehicles per day), reduce roadway operating speeds to approximately 25 to 35 mph and precipitate a higher than average accident rate throughout this segment (66 collisions in the most recent three-year period)," the meeting packet reads. "As development continues within the county, the projected traffic growth is expected to result in a Level of Service E (unstable flow, operating at capacity) traffic operations by 2025."

Since early this year, the county and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) have been working to acquire the properties needed for the project's right of way.

The county has reached agreements with six of the seven affected property owners, but has not yet been able to come to an agreement with one property owner, Tiscornia Ranches, LP.

The total properties still needed include five parcels containing 76.2 acres of land, 1 acre of CalTel easements, 4.3 acres of PG&E easements and 11.5 acres of temporary construction easements. The total fair-market value of the properties has been appraised at \$285,000, and an offer in this amount or more has been made to the property owner.

At the meeting, Director of Public Works Joshua Pack advised the board to approve the resolution in order to ensure that the necessary right-of-way could be acquired and certified by the state ahead of funding deadlines.

In order to receive \$10.3 million in funds from the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP), the county has to secure and receive certification for the right-of-way by May 3, 2021. In addition, \$4.4 million in State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds have a June 2021 funding deadline.

"If the county cannot meet these deadlines, approximately \$20.72 million in combined project funding would be lost and project construction will be delayed indefinitely," the meeting packet reads. "Since inception, approximately \$7.4 million of local STIP shares has been invested in the Wagon Trail project to support both preliminary engineering and right-of-way."

Pack said that although an agreement has yet to be reached, negotiations have not been acrimonious to date.

"We've done a lot of work to negotiate in good faith to address the issues that the property owner has identified. We've reflected that in the increased compensation," he said. "At this time we have not received any counter proposal from the property owner. ... You have to have two parties to negotiate, and we don't have that. As a result, we've reached what we'd call an impasse, which is why we're here today."

Pack said that eminent domain proceedings were not a "preferable option," but were the "last option," and that the process could take up to five months, finishing just before the funding deadlines.

"We have not taken this action in decades," he said. "We recognize the sensitivity of (imminent domain), and the impacts it can have on property owners, especially a family like the Tiscornias who have given so much to our community over many, many decades."

After a resolution of necessity is adopted, "usually parties reach an agreement before it reaches the end game and the order of possession," Pack said. "We will continue to negotiate with the property owners in parallel to this process." District 4 Supervisor Dennis Mills represents most of the area encompassing the project.

"I don't like eminent domain at all, and never have," he said. "I understand why there's contention, but I also understand that there's a public safety issue that has to be resolved. ... We have the money now, so let's move forward."

District 3 Supervisor and Board Chair Merita Callaway said that the project has been "the county's highest priority." "The goal is to do this project, and if this is the last and final step that we have to go through to do it, then I strongly believe that this is something that we need to vote on, as uncomfortable as it is," she said. "This is the last effort that we can do to make it happen, and I hope I'll have your votes."

Following a motion by Mills and a second by District 2 Supervisor Jack Garamendi, the resolution passed in a 5-0 vote. Construction on the project is planned to begin as early as next year.

http://www.calaverasenterprise.com/news/article_9116c8f2-4141-11eb-a6cc-73f0a0124793.html

Calaveras native put her retirement in storage ... literally

· [By Marc Lutz](#) / The Calaveras Enterprise / Dec. 18, 2020

Most would look at an empty piece of land off Highway 26 and think it was good for nothing more than grazing cattle. Donna Whitaker saw it was perfect for a smart retirement.

The Mokelumne Hill native made the decision to return to the area to build her retirement plan: Toyon Smart Storage.

Whitaker, a graduate of Calaveras High School, left the area to pursue her education and career, spending 30 years as a commercial appraiser in Sacramento.

"I am a commercial appraiser, by trade ... I've been doing this for 30 years," Whitaker said. "I appraise everything from high-rise office buildings in San Francisco to pistachio orchards in Visalia, the whole gamut. All of Northern California." After three decades in the corporate world, Whitaker, 59, said the work is taking its toll on her physically and emotionally. Both her father and her husband died, her children are grown, and Whitaker wanted to be able to spend more time with her mom and her dogs where life isn't so fast-paced.

"You get (a certain amount of time) to live from start to end and I wanted to be closer to my mom," Whitaker said. "She lives in San Andreas, and I get to see her every day if I want. Life is different here, right? It's a slower pace. It's a healthier pace."

It's a way of life she grew up with in Calaveras County. Her mother, Nadine Martin, worked for the assessor's office for 30 years, and father, Doug Martin, was known to many as "Doug the Barber," running his shop in Moke Hill for a time before moving it to San Andreas, retiring after 28 years.

Whitaker began planning her return to the area and what she was going to do to sustain retirement. Having done her research, she saw the demand and viability in self-storage facilities. The project reconnected her with many people, among which was Stewart Alberts, whose company Whitaker chose as her general contractor.

"(Stewart) knows everybody there is to know that's in this business," Whitaker said, mentioning she went to high school with Alberts. "Actually, this project has reconnected me with a lot of people I went to high school with, surprisingly."

The project didn't happen overnight. It took two and-a-half years to find the right location, get the facility designed, get a loan, and begin construction. And building began in March when many things became suddenly uncertain. Whitaker had no choice but to press on with her plans.

"I really didn't get a choice of whether or not I wanted to build since COVID hit because I was already committed with the loan," Whitaker said. "I've been fortunate because construction is an essential service, so I was able to move forward. Self-storage is an essential business so I'm able to continue to operate. I've been very fortunate, really, just given how many small businesses have not been that fortunate."

Four buildings on the 5-acre site house 245 units with room on the property to expand to two more buildings. A solar array has made it possible for Whitaker to keep the energy needs of the business completely self-contained, so she doesn't have to rely on Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to supply her electricity. That means she can keep the business well-lit throughout the night.

The business has also allowed Whitaker to connect with the local community, learning about those who use her services. "When people lease, they have a story and it's so interesting," Whitaker said. "I get that personal connection with people, and that's really fun. I had much less of that as an appraiser. It was more about the property."

Toyon Smart Storage was officially opened on Oct. 5 and Whitaker already has clients renting the variety of storage units available. Sizes range from 5 foot by 10 foot up to 12 foot by 30 foot. Some units are ADA-compliant, and 20% are extra tall and big to accommodate boats and RVs. Whitaker said the proximity of her business to many of the lakes and recreational areas in the Mother Lode have made her facility ideal for those who don't have the space at home to store the larger vehicles.

Clients can access the facility through a gate that is opened via smart phone, and units can be rented completely online. Outdoor parking for the bigger vehicles is also available at Toyon Smart Storage, which has around-the-clock security surveillance, but that requires a call and a physical signature rather than remote leasing options.

Whitaker has been open a short time but is already giving back to the community.

"I also have Toys 4 Tots here," she said. The space is supplied at no cost to the nonprofit organization. "They'll be here through Christmas because they're collecting inventory. They were really strapped for a place to put their stuff."

http://www.calaverasenterprise.com/news/article_3b082308-3f29-11eb-885c-97dd0d3f09a8.html

Supervisors Approve Yosemite Under Canvas Resort

B.J. Hansen Published **Dec 18, 2020**

Groveland, CA — Members of the public concerned about a planned luxury tent "glamping" resort in southern Tuolumne County focused on issues surrounding fire risk, water scarcity and increased traffic.

The Yosemite Under Canvas project was reviewed by the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors last night. The project had earlier been approved 5-1 by the planning commission, but an appeal was filed, sending it to the board of supervisors.

In the end, the supervisors voted 5-0 in support of the planning commission's decision. However, supervisor John Gray, who represents the south county, added some conditions to the project approval, and they were okayed by the fellow board members. Related to fire concerns, the developer will not be allowed to use wood stoves for heating the luxury tents, and instead must use propane. In addition, pedestrian pathways must be developed for the nearby YARTS bus turnouts. Also, the roughly \$272,000 in traffic impact mitigation fees collected from the developer will be used for needed improvements to Hardin Flat Road.

The resort will be at the intersection of Highway 120 and Hardin Flat Road. It includes 99 rental tent units, a reception tent, mobile kitchen, laundry facilities and bathrooms spread over 80 acres.

<https://www.mymotherlode.com/news/local/1433387/supervisors-approve-yosemite-under-canvas.html>

County's front-line health care workers first to get coronavirus vaccine

The Valley Springs News / December 23, 2020

Mark Twain Medical Center staff received Calaveras County's first round of COVID-19 vaccinations Thursday evening.

The vaccine was administered in phases by prioritizing groups with high risk and levels of exposure. Initial doses are going to front-line health care workers such as the staff at the medical center in San Andreas.

Nancy Hiteshow, the hospital's chief nursing officer, was the first person at the medical center to receive the vaccination. Dr. Pardeep Athwal, the hospital's chief medical officer, was the second. Kristine Dittman; Emergency Department manager/interim employee health nurse, administered the vaccines.

Vaccinations will be administered over the next several weeks to ensure that all staff members who receive one will be given the COVID-19 vaccine.

"While we are encouraged by news about the progress of vaccine development, we must remain vigilant and follow CDC guidelines- including wearing a mask and social distancing - to stop the spread of COVID- 19," according to a statement from Mark Twain Medical Center. "The care and safety of our employees and the patients we serve is always our top priority, and we look forward to sharing more with our community when additional information is available."

Calaveras Public Health says broader distribution of the vaccine will be carried out over the next few months.

In the meantime, the number of new COVID-19 cases in the county continues to escalate.

Calaveras Public Health in the past week confirmed 80 additional cases- 45 on Friday and 35 on Tuesday. That makes a total of 722 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Calaveras since the outbreak began last year in China. Of those cases, 584 patients have recovered while 116 cases remain active. There has been a total of 22 confirmed deaths related to COVID-19 in the county and five people with COVID-19 symptoms were hospitalized as of Friday (Dec. 18).

(Calaveras County is now posting COVID-19 cases by zip code. Check out this link: <https://covid19.calaverasgov.us>)

Grand jury investigation critical of backlog in assessments

By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / December 23, 2020

The 2019-20 grand jury of Calaveras County would like to see the county assessor's office quickly address its backlog of property assessments.

The grand jury last week issued its findings and recommendations on the assessor's office in a 17-page report.

"Numerous citizens have expressed concern regarding the Calaveras County Assessor's Office being significantly behind in property assessments," the grand jury said in a summary of its investigation. "The backlog results in delayed property assessments, which in turn causes the need for multiple supplemental bills, leading to taxpayer confusion. There was also concern over office management, specifically employee retention, and how it affects productivity and the work environment."

The office is behind three years on residential and four years on commercial reassessments, according to the grand jury.

"The backlog of all the re-appraisable events in Calaveras County is over 6,800," the report said.

In all other county assessor offices interviewed by the grand jury, backlogs for reassessments were in the range of two months to two years.

Permanent staffing reached a high of 19 in 2007-08 and dropped to 11.3 in 2011-12, but has rebounded to 17 in 2019-20. However, retention has been a problem the past few years.

"Even with the addition of three positions between 2017 and 2019, the (assessor's office) is still unable to increase staff sufficiently to fill those positions."

Pay could be an issue.

"Calaveras County wages for higher-level appraisers are lower than most foothill counties and lower than most foothill counties for entry-level appraiser positions," the report said.

The grand jury's first recommendation calls for the county administrative office to develop a plan to address the backlog issue through a "comprehensive staffing and work methods analysis" and present the findings to the Board of Supervisors and the assessor's office by June 30, 2021.

Furthermore, the grand jury recommends the assessor's office to develop a plan by April 30, 2021, to bring all re-assessments up to within one year of the re-appraisable events by June 30, 2022.

The grand jury calls for the office to authorize overtime by April 30, 2021, using current appraisers and staff to reduce the backlog by June 30, 2022.

In addition, the jury recommends the Board of Supervisors maintain sufficient funding for the assessor's office to bring all reassessments to within one year of all reappraisable events by June 30, 2022.

To address the public's concerns, the grand jury is calling for the assessor's office to develop a plan by April 30, 2021, "to provide outreach using public forums and/or notifications to educate property owners about the effects of the backlog."

Furthermore, the grand jury recommends the assessor's office, beginning April 30, 2021, provide quarterly progress reports to the Board of Supervisors regarding how many reassessments were not completed prior to the expiration of the statute of limitations, as well as the number that are pending or backlogged.

To address staffing, the grand jury recommends the assessor's office work in conjunction with the county's human resources office to develop a recruitment/retention plan to attract and retain qualified employees.

County Assessor Leslie Davis was unavailable for comment. A spokeswoman in her office said Davis was in the middle of training people until the end of next week and would not be available to comment until that time or after the holidays.

RCRC (Rural County Representatives of California)

The Barbed Wire – December 18, 2020

California Broadband Council Approves Action Plan

On Thursday, the California Broadband Council (Council) approved the final draft of its Broadband for All Action Plan (Plan), which broadly outlines the State's strategy to bridge the digital divide. The Plan highlights numerous challenges to statewide adoption of high-speed internet connectivity, such as availability, affordability, and access to appropriate devices. Specific actions set forth in the Plan include:

- modernizing the state broadband definition to conform to the federal standard of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload, with a goal of 100/20 Mbps;
- improving existing state and local processes to expedite deployment;
- identifying alternative broadband infrastructure financing opportunities; and,
- setting reliability standards for critical infrastructure.

The Council directed staff to make several minor modifications to the Plan before publicly releasing the final document at the end of the month. The Plan will be reviewed periodically by the Council and updated as necessary.

The Governor issued Executive Order N-73-20 in August, which directed the Council to create a new state broadband action plan outlining how the state could accelerate broadband deployment and adoption. RCRC provided comments to the Council during the Plan drafting process, and encouraged the Council to prioritize open access projects, require connectivity speeds of 100 Mbps symmetrical, and allow municipal broadband to receive equal consideration for state funding. RCRC's comment letter can be found here. For further information, contact Tracy Rhine at trhine@rcrcnet.org.

Bill of the Week: SB 55 (Stern) - Development Prohibition in State Responsibility Area Lands

On the first day of the 2021-2022 Legislative session, Senator Henry Stern (D-Calabasas), introduced Senate Bill 55, which would prohibit all commercial and residential development in Very High Fire Hazards Severity Zones (VHFHSZ) and State Responsibility Areas (SRA). This measure is identical to the unsuccessful SB 474, a last-minute effort by Senator Stern which RCRC strongly opposed in the previous legislative session.

While RCRC supports the underlying goal of mitigating the loss of life and property in high fire prone areas, SB 55 will ban anything from a simple Christmas tree farm in one area of the state to a new restaurant in another. Depriving individual property owners of the ability to utilize land or engage in legitimate business also presents potential "takings" challenges, adding associated costs, not only for the affected individual, but to taxpayers of the state. Meanwhile, California continues to struggle with a housing shortage, especially homes affordable to those with low and very-low incomes. In addition, the increased loss of life and structural damage caused by California's recent wildfires have caused reconsideration of housing development in fire-prone areas and the further winnowing of available lands for development. RCRC believes that these challenges require a holistic, equitable, and reasonable policy solution – something that is lacking in SB 55.

RCRC's letter of opposition can be accessed here. This legislation will be eligible for action January 7, 2021; however, it is not anticipated this bill will be set for hearing before March. For more information, contact Tracy Rhine, RCRC Legislative Advocate at (916) 447-4806 or trhine@rcrcnet.org.

Hometown California New Episode- RCRC Speaks with UC President Drake About COVID Vaccine, Broadband, Agriculture, and More

In the newest episode of *Hometown California*, RCRC Vice President for Governmental Affairs, Paul A. Smith, speaks with the Dr. Michael V. Drake, the 21st President of the University of California about the intersection of the UC and rural communities of the Golden State. ([Download now](#))

For many rural communities, the significance of the UC goes beyond the education, licensing, and credentialing it provides. Partnerships between the UC and rural communities have a considerable impact as well. One of the most important UC programs involved in rural communities is the Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) Cooperative Extension. Listen in,

as Paul and Dr. Drake discuss the funding and the future of that program as well as other topics such as enrollment trends, distance learning/broadband deployment and how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the University as a whole.

This is the final episode in our 2020 season, but stay tuned...*Hometown California* will return in 2021 with all new episodes! Over the holidays, we hope you enjoy listening to previous episodes, and share *Hometown California* with your constituents, friends, and family. Help RCRC tell the rural story in our communities and beyond. Find all the episodes and subscribe through your favorite listening app [right here](#).

Check out these helpful links to learn more about the University of California and get connected:

- [UC Homepage](#)
- [UCANR Cooperative Extension](#)

Coronavirus Relief Negotiations Update

Earlier this week, a bipartisan/bicameral group of lawmakers unveiled the details of their \$908 billion coronavirus (COVID-19) relief package. The package contains two separate bills – one which outlined approximately \$750 billion of relatively non-controversial pandemic relief spending; the second contained a controversial \$160 billion plan to provide state and local aid along with liability protections for businesses that remain open during the pandemic. However, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) said he supported dropping the "two most contentious items for the moment" — liability protections and aid to state and local governments — that have stalled negotiations and prevented Congress from passing any meaningful COVID-19 legislation since March. "We all know that the new Administration is going to be asking for yet another package. It's not like we won't have another opportunity to debate the merits of liability reform and of state and local government in the very near future," Majority Leader McConnell said. At the time of this writing, it appears that the state and local aid/business liability protections will not move forward before the new 117th Congress is sworn in the first days of January. Passage of the primary relief bill remains difficult but doable before the end of the year as it is caught-up in the complex process of completing an overall federal spending plan for the 2021 fiscal year.

Broadband Projects in Colusa and Plumas Counties awarded \$11 million

On Thursday, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) awarded over \$11 million in high-speed broadband infrastructure grants from the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) to project awardees in rural counties. The CASF provides financial grants, funded by customer surcharges, to qualified service providers for broadband service in unserved or underserved areas. Collectively, these grants will service 740 unserved households in Colusa and Plumas counties, as well as a new housing project in the City of Santa Rosa. The CPUC press release is available [here](#). RCRC remains actively engaged in legislative and regulatory efforts for broadband access and infrastructure in rural communities. For more information, please contact Tracy Rhine at trhine@rcrcnert.org.

Newly Nominated Department of Transportation Secretary Buttigieg on Vehicle Miles Traveled

On Tuesday, President-Elect Biden announced his intent to nominate former South Bend, Indiana Mayor and Democratic Presidential Candidate Pete Buttigieg to be the Secretary of Transportation. At the Department of Transportation, Buttigieg will oversee a budget of about \$90 billion — including about \$22 billion in discretionary dollars — and manage a staff of about 55,000. Buttigieg was one of the few 2020 presidential contenders to endorse a proposal of transitioning from the current Highway Trust Fund, which is paid for through the gas tax, to a "vehicle miles traveled" alternative that would tax drivers based on their road mileage. The current gas tax was last increased in 1993 under President Bill Clinton and since 2008, Congress has sustained highway spending by transferring over \$140 billion of general revenues to the fund. While Buttigieg's plan calls for the eventual transition away from the current gas tax system, his plan also calls for a \$165 billion infusion of federal dollars to keep the highway system solvent through 2029 while the conversion occurred.

Senate Votes on Feinstein Bill to Expand Marijuana Research

On Tuesday, the U.S. Senate passed the *Cannabidiol and Marihuana Research Expansion Act* by unanimous consent. The bill, introduced by Senator Diane Feinstein, would require the Department of Justice to increase the number of researchers allowed to study marijuana and the quantity of marijuana that is produced for research. Currently, it is very difficult for scientists to accurately study the effects of marijuana because only one facility — the University of Mississippi — is legally allowed to grow marijuana for scientific research. With both chambers heavily invested in passing a number of cumbersome pieces of legislation before the end of the year, it remains unclear if the House of representatives will take up the Senate's bill. It should be noted that last week, the House passed a measure to decriminalize cannabis at the federal level. That measure is not expected to be considered in the Senate in the closing days of the 116th Congress.

Click [here](#) for the bill text, [here](#) for a one-page summary of the bill's provisions, and [here](#) for a list of organizations that have endorsed the bill.

BULLETIN BOARD

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

Online Tool Connects Residents in High Risk Areas with a Pathway to Home Insurance

As a result of the work of the California Tree Mortality Task Force, in 2018, the California Insurance Commissioner issued a report containing recommendations to address homeowners' insurance cancellations and non-renewals in tree mortality and other high fire risk areas. The report identified Yapacopia, a public benefit corporation, as the provider of a free online service connecting homeowners in high risk areas—even those who have been denied previously— with insurers, insurance agents, and brokers. The [MatchUP Insurance Finder](#) connects county residents with insurance providers quickly. A unique webpage has been created for each county, providing information, links, and useful tools. In addition, Yapacopia will provide a webinar for any county to discuss wildfire preparation and recovery, and insurance issues. More information about Yapacopia and the MatchUP Insurance Finder is available [here](#).

Workshop Registration is Open For 2021 Off-Highway Vehicle Grants and Cooperative Agreements

Mark your calendars for upcoming grant opportunities for local governments and other entities to manage off-highway vehicle recreation. On January 6-7, 2021, a [virtual workshop](#) will be held to offer technical assistance on applying for and/or learning about projects. These grant dollars support planning, acquisition, development, maintenance, administration, operation, enforcement, restoration, and conservation of trails, trailheads, areas, and other facilities associated with the use of off-highway motor vehicles, and programs involving off-highway motor vehicle safety or education. Applications are due March 1, 2021 and will be awarded mid-summer 2021. For more information and how to register, see [here](#).

COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT/CALAVERAS PLANNING COALITION
www.calaverascap.com

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