

# Weekly ReCAP May 14, 2021



*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](http://www.calaverascap.com)

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**Donate Now**

## **Join Us!**

*Get a glimpse into what CPC membership is like by attending a meeting. There is no commitment, just show up and listen in!*

## **Next Calaveras Planning Coalition Meeting**

**June 7, 2021 3 P.M. - 5 P.M.**

**New Members Welcome at CPC Meetings**

Organizations, groups, and individuals (known as associate members) may join the Calaveras Planning Coalition (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.](http://www.calaverascap.com)

There is no membership fee. However, members are encouraged to donate to the Community Action Project/Calaveras Planning

Coalition. 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 and CPC meetings will be held online via Zoom until restrictions are lifted by the Public Health Department.*

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## **Board of Supervisors Meeting May 18, 2021 - Agenda Important Agenda Item 2:**

*Receive presentation on Integrated Waste Management and Provide staff direction concerning revisions to the tipping and solid waste parcel fee schedules and concerning the design of Phase III at the Rock Creek Landfill.*

## **Planning Commission Meeting May 27, 2021 Agenda**

**Planning Commission meetings are now open to the public** with limited seating in the Board of Supervisors chambers. Face coverings and social distancing are required. Zoom is optional for commissioners and public; likely at least one planning commissioner will continue to participate by Zoom. This was decided by the PC May 13 after a long discussion/second continuance on proposed Cannabis Cultivation Ordinance changes (to add testing and distribution). "There was some disagreement re: possible need for new EIR; one commissioner was absent; there was a desire for more time to process, and a desire for the

public to be able to comment in person. The ordinance was continued to May 27. The PC will re-open public comments on the draft ordinance at the May 27 meeting. " - Colleen

*Thanks to CPC member Colleen Platt for attending and reporting back!*

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## Calaveras County Public Health reports additional COVID-19 death that occurred during winter surge

*Calaveras Enterprise / May 12, 2021*

Another COVID-19 related that occurred during Calaveras County's winter surge of the coronavirus was recently reported to local health officials by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). "Sadly, we received news from CDPH that a male, age 62, was identified as having died due to COVID during our recent surge. Our condolences go to the individual's family during this difficult time," county Health and Human Services Director Cori Allen wrote in an email.

The county's Public Health Division previously disclosed that fluctuations in local COVID-19 data are due to the department's efforts to reconcile case information with the state's reporting system.

Many of those reported deaths occurred in out-of-county hospitals.

To date, a total of 54 COVID-19 related deaths of Calaveras County residents have been confirmed.

The most recent death, a 78-year-old male, was reported on May 4. A Tuesday update from Public Health showed 10 active confirmed cases

of COVID-19 in the county and one related hospitalization.

## Community church finishes conversion of thrift store into low-income housing

*Dakota Morlan / The Calaveras Enterprise / May 12, 2021*

After more than a year of planning and renovations, a former church thrift store in Murphys has been converted into a two-bedroom, one bathroom residence for someone who is facing homelessness.

The project is a partnership between Murphys-based Faith Lutheran Church and Sierra HOPE, a non-profit organization that offers a wide range of supportive services to at-risk residents of Calaveras, Tuolumne and Amador counties. The organization's Supportive Housing Program provides housing and case management services for people who are homeless and unable to afford housing because of a physical or mental disability.

According to Rob Westerhoff, council president at Faith Lutheran Church and architect for the project, the congregation needed to lease out the small, red building on Mitchler Street in order to stay afloat financially after the thrift shop closed in December 2020. The need for low-income housing in the community was discussed, and the decision was made to partner with Sierra HOPE to provide long-term transitional housing for the homeless.

The addition of the new residence, which was officially unveiled and blessed by Rev. Karen Johnson on May 1, will provide two more beds for at-risk individuals in a county with only three permanent supportive housing beds, according to Jerry Cadotte, executive director for Sierra HOPE.

He added that the organization already has “somebody in mind” to call the new house their home.

“There are always plenty of people in need of this kind of housing,” he said. “We’re very grateful to Faith Lutheran for their efforts and for their wanting to work with us to address the issue of homelessness in Calaveras County.”

With the help of grant money, including \$20,000 from the Calaveras Community Foundation, and donations from the congregation and local businesses, the project was finished on-time and under budget at roughly \$75,000. One member of the congregation volunteered to paint the house, while the church also sponsored items like towels that were not included in the renovation.

“Steve Hall was our general contractor and did a great job,” Westerhoff said. “It really was a community effort to get the thing done.”

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## A dangerous fire season looms as the drought-stricken Western U.S. heads for a water crisis

*Amir AghaKouchak, Associate Professor of Civil & Environmental Engineering, University of California, Irvine, Mojtaba Sadegh, Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering, Boise State University, and John Abatzoglou, Associate Professor of Engineering, University of California, Merced /May 13, 2021*

Just about every indicator of drought is flashing red across the western U.S. after a dry winter and warm early spring. The snowpack

is at less than half of normal in much of the region. Reservoirs are being drawn down, river levels are dropping and soils are drying out.

It's only May, and states are already considering water use restrictions to make the supply last longer. California's governor declared a drought emergency in 41 of 58 counties. In Utah, irrigation water providers are increasing fines for overuse. Some Idaho ranchers are talking about selling off livestock because rivers and reservoirs they rely on are dangerously low and irrigation demand for farms is only just beginning.

Scientists are also closely watching the impact that the rapid warming and drying is having on trees, worried that water stress could lead to widespread tree deaths. Dead and drying vegetation means more fuel for what is already expected to be another dangerous fire season.

As climate scientists, we track these changes. Right now, about 84% of the western U.S. is under some level of drought, and there is no sign of relief.

The U.S. Drought Monitor for mid-May shows nearly half of the West in severe or extreme drought. National Drought Mitigation Center/USDA/NOAA

### **The many faces of drought**

Several types of drought are converging in the West this year, and all are at or near record levels.

When too little rain and snow falls, it's known as meteorological drought. In April, precipitation across large parts of the West was less than 10% of normal, and the lack of rain continued into May.

Rivers, lakes, streams and groundwater can get into what's known as hydrological drought when their water levels fall. Many states are now warning about low streamflow after a winter with less-than-normal snowfall and warm spring temperatures in early 2021 speeding up melting. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation said Lake Mead, a giant Colorado River reservoir that provides water for millions of people, is on pace to fall to levels in June that could trigger the first federal water shortage declaration, with water use restrictions across the region.

Dwindling soil moisture leads to another problem, known as agricultural drought. The average soil moisture levels in the western U.S. in April were at or near their lowest levels in over 120 years of observations.

These factors can all drive ecosystems beyond their thresholds – into a condition called ecological drought – and the results can be dangerous and costly. Fish hatcheries in Northern California have started trucking their salmon to the Pacific Ocean, rather than releasing them into rivers, because the river water is expected to be at historic low levels and too warm for young salmon to tolerate.

### **Snow drought**

One of the West's biggest water problems this year is the low snowpack. The western U.S. is critically dependent on winter snow slowly melting in the mountains and providing a steady supply of water during the dry summer months. But the amount of water in snowpack is on the decline here and across much of the world as global temperatures rise.



Several states are already seeing how that can play out. Federal scientists in Utah warned in early May that more water from the snowpack is sinking into the dry ground where it fell this year, rather than running off to supply streams and rivers. With the state's snowpack at 52% of normal, streamflows are expected to be well below normal through the summer, with some places at less than 20%. Snowpack is typically measured by the amount of water it holds, known as snow water equivalent.

### **Anthropogenic drought**

It's important to understand that drought today isn't only about nature. More people are moving into the U.S. West, increasing demand for water and irrigated farmland. And global warming – driven by human activities like the burning of fossil fuels – is now fueling more widespread and intense droughts in the region. These two factors act as additional straws pulling water from an already scarce resource.

As demand for water has increased, the West is pumping out more groundwater for irrigation and other needs. Centuries-old groundwater reserves in aquifers can provide resilience against droughts if they are used sustainably. But groundwater reserves recharge slowly, and the West is seeing a decline in those resources, mostly because water use for agriculture outpaces their recharge. Water levels in some wells have dropped at a rate of 6.5 feet (2 meters) per year.

The result is that these regions are less able to manage droughts when nature does bring hot, dry conditions.

California fish hatcheries have started trucking their salmon to the Pacific Ocean because the rivers they are usually released into are too low and warm. Rising global temperatures also play several roles in drought. They influence whether precipitation falls as snow or rain, how quickly snow melts and, importantly, how quickly the land, trees and vegetation dry out.

Extreme heat and droughts can intensify one another. Solar radiation causes water to evaporate, drying the soil and air. With less moisture, the soil and air then heat up, which dries the soil even more. The result is extremely dry trees and grasses that can quickly burn when fires break out, and also thirstier soils that demand more irrigation.

Alarming, the trigger for the drying and warming cycle has been changing. In the 1930s, lack of precipitation used to trigger this cycle, but excess heat has initiated the process in recent decades. As global warming increases temperatures, soil moisture evaporates earlier and at larger rates, drying out soils and triggering the warming and drying cycle.

### **Fire warnings ahead**

Hot, dry conditions in the West last year fueled a record-breaking wildfire season that burned over 15,900 square miles (41,270 square kilometers), including the largest fires on record in Colorado and California.

As drought persists, the chance of large, disastrous fires increases. The seasonal outlook of warmer and drier-than-normal conditions for summer and fire season outlooks by federal agencies suggest another tough, long fire year is ahead.

*This article is republished from The Conversation, a nonprofit news site dedicated to sharing ideas from academic experts. It was written by: Mojtaba Sadegh, Boise State University; Amir AghaKouchak, University of California, Irvine, and John Abatzoglou, University of California, Merced.*

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## Conservation in California

*Your voice is needed!*

Let the great state of California know what Conservation means to you! In support of the 30x30 initiative to save 30% of our lands and waters by 2030, the state is seeking input from stakeholders about what **we** want conservation to look like in California.

[All you have to do is take the short 15 question survey found here!](#)

This process has incredible potential for protecting precious lands in California. How would YOU conserve 30% of California's lands by 2030?

### **Effective Strategies so far include:**

Conservation Plans

Laws & Regulations

### **Challenges include:**

Competing Land Uses

Resource Limitations

**Success Looks Like:**

Protecting Biodiversity

Resilience to Climate Change

Supporting rural economies

Reducing risks to people and places

Prioritizing Grassland, Forests and Shrubland

**Challenges to Climate Smart in CA:**

Croplands (inefficient water use high consumption)

Forests and Shrublands (burning)

Policy, Public investments, private investments

[You can view the action alert here for more details, including CAP's priorities for conservation through the 30x30 initiative.](#)



## **Did you know ... May is Wildfire Awareness Month**

Learn more about how to prepare  
your family and prevent wildfires at  
[Wildfire Safety | American Red Cross.](#)

*With May being wildfire awareness Month, the American Red Cross is urging everyone to make their preparations now. 2020's massive wildfires in the west were responsible for 37 deaths and more than \$19 billion in damages. Wildfires are dangerous and can spread quickly, giving you only minutes to evacuate. Protect your household, get ready now.*

## **Here are four simple steps you can take to be prepared:**

1. **Create an evacuation plan.** Plan multiple routes to local shelters, register family members with special medical needs as required and make plans for pets. If you already have an emergency plan, update and review it with family members so everyone knows what to do if an emergency occurs.
2. **Build an emergency kit** with a gallon of water per person, per day, non-perishable food, a flashlight, battery-powered radio, first aid kit, medications, supplies for an infant or pets if applicable, a multi-purpose tool, personal hygiene items, copies of important papers, cell phone chargers, extra cash, blankets, maps of the area and emergency contact information. Because of the pandemic, include a mask for everyone in your household. If you already have a disaster kit, now is the time make sure the food and water is still okay to consume and that copies of important documents are up to date.
3. **Be informed.** Find out how local officials will contact you during a wildfire emergency and how you will get important information, such as evacuation orders.
4. **Download the free Red Cross Emergency app** to help keep you and your loved ones safe with real-time alerts, open Red Cross shelter locations and safety advice on wildfires and other

emergencies. Wildfire season is really all year round, but most fires occur between June and August.

## Blackouts Threaten Entire U.S. West This Summer as Heat Awaits

*Naureen Malik, David R Baker and Mark Chediak / Bloomberg / May 13, 2021*

First they struck California, then Texas. Now blackouts are threatening the entire U.S. West as nearly a dozen states head into summer with too little electricity.

From New Mexico to Washington, power grids are being strained by forces years in the making — some of them fueled by climate change, others by the fight against it. If a heat wave strikes the whole region at once, the rolling outages that darkened Southern California and Silicon Valley last August will have been previews, not flukes.

“It’s really the same case in different parts of the West,” said Elliot Mainzer, chief executive officer of the California Independent System Operator, which runs most of the state’s grid. “It’s revealed competition for scarce resources that we haven’t seen for some time.”

The specter of blackouts highlights a paradox of the clean-energy transition: Extreme weather fueled by climate change is exposing cracks in society’s move away from fossil fuels, even as that shift is supposed to rein in the worst of global warming. States shuttering coal and gas-fired power plants simply aren’t replacing

them fast enough to keep pace with the vagaries of an unstable climate, and the region's existing power infrastructure is woefully vulnerable to wildfires (which threaten transmission lines), drought (which saps once-abundant hydropower resources) and heat waves (which play havoc with demand). On Wednesday, California's grid managers warned that while they're better positioned than last summer, the risk of power shortages during extreme heat remains a clear possibility. Wildfires, already getting started after a dry winter, could compound the danger if they threaten transmission lines.

"We are headed to yet another very dangerous fire year," U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said during a briefing Thursday. "We're seeing a higher level of risk and an earlier level risk." For many, California's power crisis in 2020 was the first indication of how serious the regional power shortfall had become. While the blackouts highlighted the state's reliance on solar power — a resource that ebbs in the evening just as demand picks up — an equally significant problem was California's dependence on imported electricity. Utilities routinely source power supplies from out of state, drawing electricity across high-voltage transmission lines to wherever it's needed. But last summer, neighboring states coping with the same heat wave as California were straining to keep their own lights on, and imports were hard to come by.

This year, that dynamic is playing out on a larger scale. Across the West, states have grown dependent on importing power from one another. That works fine in temperate weather, when electricity demand is relatively low. But it's a problem when a widespread heatwave blankets the entire region. The Western Electricity Coordinating Council, which oversees electricity grids throughout the western U.S. and Canada, estimates that without imports,

Nevada, Utah and Colorado could be short of power during hundreds of hours this year, or the equivalent of 34 days. Arizona and New Mexico could be short for enough hours to total 17 days, according to a report by the organization that looked at worst-case scenarios to help states develop plans to head off potential outages.

“It’s no longer necessarily a California problem or a Phoenix problem,” said Jordan White, vice president of strategic engagement for the group, known as WECC. “Everyone is chasing the same number of megawatts.”

While blackouts aren’t a guarantee in any region, traders are already betting on supply shortages and sending power prices soaring throughout the West. At the heavily traded Palo Verde hub in Arizona, prices have nearly quadrupled since last summer’s outages, while the Pacific Northwest’s Mid-Columbia hub has tripled.

“We are already seeing record-breaking prices across the West, some of which can be attributed to a fear factor being priced in,” said JP McMahon, a market associate for Wood Mackenzie. “Last year was a bit of a wake-up call.”

The reasons behind the shortfall are two-fold: Climate change is making it harder to forecast demand for electricity while the shift to clean energy is straining power supplies.

Where utilities and grid managers were once able to rely on predictable consumption patterns season to season — more air conditioner use in August, less in October — they’re now



reckoning with record-hot summers and historic winter storms that cause great, unexpected surges in demand.

“It’s becoming challenging to take out the crystal ball to know with any level of certainty how hot it it’s going to be,” White said.

At the same time, older coal and gas plants capable of providing power 24 hours a day are being pushed out by climate change regulations and their own dwindling profitability. In the West, power generation from such plants slipped 6% from 2010 through 2018, according to WECC. While wind and solar capacity have more than tripled in the region, the output from those resources varies by the hour, making them harder to rely on during an unexpected demand crunch. Massive batteries can help make up the difference, but their installation is just beginning.

It’s a global phenomenon. Sweden this summer is bracing for power outages and curbing electricity exports after nuclear retirements have left the country with too little spare capacity to balance big swings in demand. In China last winter, even a surplus of coal plants couldn’t keep the lights on during a severe cold blast.

At this point, no subregion in WECC’s coverage area generates enough electricity to meet its own needs during periods of high demand; they all rely on imports to avoid outages.

In the aftermath of the California crisis, utilities have been signing up contracts for more emergency power supplies and are trying to make sure they aren’t relying on the same suppliers as everyone else. Some entities, including the Imperial Irrigation District of Southern California are working to curb their reliance on imports.

But it's not clear that all utilities in the highest-risk areas plan to do much differently.

The situation is, if not dire, getting close. Temperatures in the West are expected to be above average through the summer, with the worst heat slamming the Southwest. More than 84% of land in the 11 Western states is gripped by drought.

Following last summer's outages, California is among the best positioned going into summer. The state is plugging roughly 1,500 megawatts of batteries into the grid, has postponed the retirement of several aging gas plants and raised the price cap on power trades to incentivize imports if outside supplies are necessary and available.

Even if imports are readily available for those that need them, there's no guarantee that transmission lines will be able to carry those electrons where they need to go. Extreme weather can take out the high-voltage conduits that stitch the Western states together, and wildfires are notorious for knocking out transmission lines. Although it received little attention at the time, a major transmission line in the Pacific Northwest that suffered damage in a storm last spring limited power flows into California throughout the summer energy crisis.

Energy consultant Mike Florio, who used to sit on the board of California's grid operator, said other states can learn from the West's dilemma. They should keep a variety of resources as they decarbonize, learning how to balance the daily rhythms of solar and wind, and not move too quickly to shutter old gas-burning plants that can provide power in a pinch.

“We forget that we’re still learning a lot about how to run a system like this,” Florio said. “We probably want to keep our existing gas capacity, at least in reserve. It may be used less, but something that’s already built is cheap insurance.”

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## Commissioner Lara calls for insurance companies to support home-hardening and community mitigation safety efforts during Wildfire Awareness Month

News: 2021 Press Release

For Release: May 13, 2021

Media Calls Only: 916-492-3566

Email Inquiries: [cdipress@insurance.ca.gov](mailto:cdipress@insurance.ca.gov)

LOS ANGELES, Calif.

Joined by California homeowners and first responders during Wildfire Awareness Month, Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara gave an update on the proactive actions he is taking to protect and prepare Californians. He also announced that some insurance companies are providing premium discounts to homeowners who take steps to harden their homes and neighborhoods against wildfires – and called on more insurance companies to incentivize this important and necessary fire mitigation.

“The science is clear: Wildfire-hardened homes and neighborhoods better resist damage and are easier for firefighters to defend, protecting lives, homes, and our first responders,” said Commissioner Lara. “When insurance companies recognize the benefit of hardening your home and offer incentives to consumers, that just builds on homeowners’ hard work and strengthens a competitive insurance market.”

Currently eight insurers and the California FAIR Plan offer premium discounts depending on the home characteristics or neighborhood mitigation efforts. The companies represent approximately 13 percent of the state residential market. That number has increased from 6.8 percent since Commissioner Lara took office in 2019 with many more homeowners insurance companies approaching the Department with filings containing home- and community-hardening mitigation incentives and discounts.

Community leaders from across the state said insurance incentives would strengthen their efforts to increase mitigation in local communities across the state. "With a little education and planning to prepare we can significantly reduce our risk for wildfire," said Elaine Himelfarb, executive director of the Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council. "We all need to take responsibility for what we are doing as much as we can to protect our homes, our pets, our loved ones, our neighbors, our communities, the environment and home-hardening is one of the most effective things we can do."

"There's been a lot of attention on wildfires being bigger and burning longer and being more destructive than ever, and people can get overwhelmed by these reports," said Novato Fire District Chief Bill Tyler, whose department serves the city of Novato and surrounding areas of Marin County. "There are pathways to resilience and prevention, and measures to avoid wildfire losses. Hardening one's home by installing ignition-resistant building materials and modifying the landscape vegetation immediately around the home removes the hazards and lowers one's risk, period. Our end destination is for insurers to see how these

pathways merge to multiple lanes that come together and create a framework for avoiding loss.”

“Our community has developed a multifaceted approach to fire prevention,” said East Bay homeowner Sue Wecht, executive board member of the Orinda Firewise Council, a network of fire-mitigated communities. “We look forward to continuing to work with Commissioner Lara, and we are hoping that by taking these fire prevention measures around our homes, neighborhoods, and throughout our city that insurance companies will recognize our efforts and reward us with more availability and give us credit to offset the expenses that we have incurred.”

With our growing drought state of emergency and the reality of climate change, Commissioner Lara is working alongside Governor Gavin Newsom and state legislative leaders to rapidly increase incentives and funding for wildfire preparation. Commissioner Lara announced a wildfire mitigation partnership with Governor Newsom’s administration in February that will establish home- and community-hardening measures for retrofits of older existing homes in order to help them seek and maintain insurance coverage. Representatives from the Department of Insurance, Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (CalOES), the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR), and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) have been meeting since then.

“We have to help those who are least able to afford to harden their homes, including our seniors, through insurance incentives and financial assistance through our state budget,” added Commissioner Lara. “As I continue working with the Governor’s

administration on creating a list of consistent mitigation measures, I want to see more insurance companies offering and expanding their incentive programs to support attainable mitigation efforts.”

Commissioner Lara strongly supports additional state budget funding for retrofits of existing older homes in vulnerable areas. Governor Newsom expedited \$536 million for wildfire preparation with his signing of Senate Bill 85 in April, including \$25 million in funds to assist home-hardening projects. Commissioner Lara supports additional spending on low-cost retrofits of homes under the California Wildfire Mitigation Financial Assistance Program, passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Newsom in 2019.

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## Even the Trees in the Lake Are Burning

by MURIEL ZELLER

When the age of fire came,  
the fragile days of ash,  
we picked through each black hour  
to find a name for loss.

In charcoal flower fields  
we picked our black bouquets,  
laid black wreaths upon the ground  
and measured out the graves.

We mourned in ghosted smoke  
until the midnight broke  
and fell upon our backs  
when the moon was new.

Then black and black was all.  
Then blind is what we were.

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from Slipstream*

## Sierra Nevada Conservancy Funding Opportunities Newsletter for April/May

*This is an electronic newsletter published every two months containing information on upcoming grant and funding opportunities for the Sierra Nevada region. The newsletter includes federal, state, and private foundation funders as well as additional resources and information related to grant funding. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy provides the Funding Opportunities Newsletter as a free resource under its Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program.*



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