



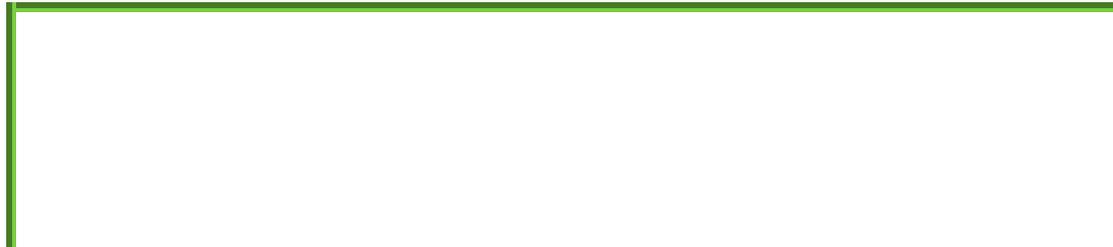
Protecting our rural environment by promoting citizen participation in sustainable land use planning since 2006

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

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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

November 1, 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.

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.

Board Of Supervisors October 12, 2021

[Agenda](#)

Planning Commission Meeting October 14, 2021

[Agenda](#)

[Agenda Packet](#)

Items of Interest:

1. **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and Reduction Plan:**

Calaveras County is proposing to adopt baseline emissions standards in order to come into compliance with the California Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32, 2006) and its successor bill (SB 32, 2016). This presentation by Sierra

Business Council is Phase I of the project recommending the Planning Commission accept the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory as the baseline for development of GHG Emissions Reduction Plans for Calaveras County. (Tim Pitt, Planner II)

2. **2021-007 Conditional Use Permit for Roger Allen, “Liberty Guns & Ammo”**: The applicant is requesting approval of a Conditional Use Permit to operate a gun shop and gunsmith retail business in the existing building located at 49 California Street in Valley Springs. The subject property is located at 49 California Street in Valley Springs. APN: 046-011-065 is a 0.34 acre parcel in Section 24, T4N, R10E, MDM. Pursuant to CEQA guidelines a Negative Declaration has been prepared for this project. (Gina Kathan, Interim Planning Director)

3. **2020-017 Tentative Parcel Map for Jay Woods**: The applicant is requesting approval of a Tentative Parcel Map to divide a 14.31-acre parcel into two parcels, 9.31 acres and 5 acres in size. The subject parcel is located at 5567 Amos Lane, in Burson. APN: 048-025-292 is located in Southeast ¼ of Section 1, T04N, R10E, MDM. Pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines, a Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared. (Madeleine Flandreau, Planner II)

4. **2005-125 Extension of Time for Sherri Shively**: The applicant has requested a 12-month Extension of Time for Tentative Parcel Map 2005-125. The approved map is to divide the 80-acre parcel into four (4) five-acre parcels and one 60-acre remainder parcel. APN 048-018-030 is located at 5816 Hwy 12, Wallace, in the SW 1/4 of Section 24, T04N, R09E, MDM. A Mitigated Negative Declaration was adopted for the original approval of the Tentative Parcel Map in accordance with CEQA. (Madeleine Flandreau, Planner I)

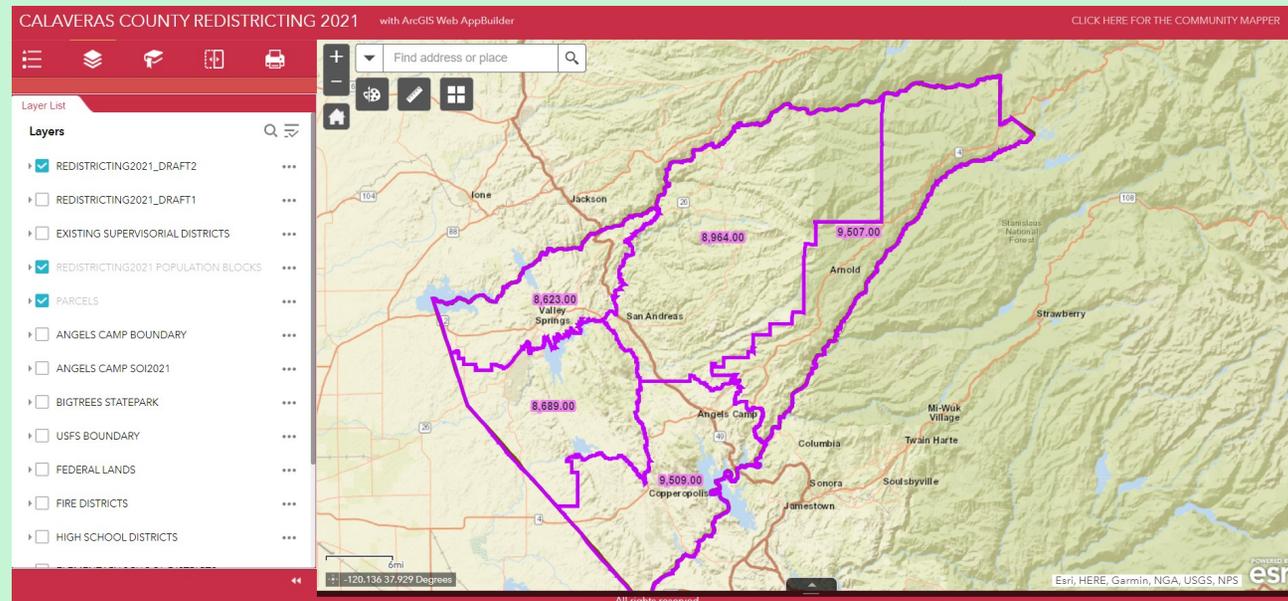
**Redistricting Public Hearing Date Change
October 26, 2021**

The next redistricting public hearing will be held on October 26, 2021, in the Board of Supervisors Chambers. The community is encouraged to attend the hearing and provide input on the draft map. The date of the public hearing was changed to provide the community with more time to draft their own maps and continue submitting public comment.

Alternative preliminary draft maps can be found on the [County's redistricting webpage](#) by clicking on "[draft maps](#)". The supervisorial districts must be drawn in a manner that evenly distributes the County's population between each district. In addition to population, the County must take into account geographic contiguity, integrity of local communities of interest and cities, consideration of natural and man-made barriers, and compactness.

The public may continue to utilize [community mapper](#) to submit community of interest maps and to make public comments. Written public comments and paper maps may also be submitted to the County Registrar of Voters Office, 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas, CA 95249.

Please contact the County Clerk at redistricting@co.calaveras.ca.us, or call (209)754-6376 with any questions or comments. More information is available on the County Webpage under [Redistricting](#).



Local News

Calaveras County COVID-19 Data October 5 2021

- 3,573 Total confirmed cases
- 3,450 Recovered cases
- 47 Active cases
- 76 Deaths
- 2 Active hospitalizations
- 53.89% Fully Vaccinated

County releases draft map of new supervisorial district boundaries

Enterprise Report / Calaveras Enterprise / September 29, 2021

To view the draft map, [click here](#).

PROPOSED COMMUNITIES	
Copperopolis	2♥
San Andreas	3♥
Brenda McHenry	2♥
Rancho Calaveras / Jenny Lind Community Area	3♥
Sheep Ranch	2♥
West Hills Rancho Calaveras	0♥
Greater Mountain Ranch	0♥
Valley Hills Estates	1♥
Vallecito	6♥

The county recently released a draft map of new supervisorial district boundaries for public review.

The draft map incorporates 2020 Census data, as well as comments received from the community. In September, county supervisors hosted four pre-draft map public workshops. The public was also encouraged to weigh in with an online “community mapper” tool, as well as invited to submit comments to the county registrar of voters office.

Redistricting occurs every 10 years following the U.S. Census to ensure that districts contain roughly the same number of people. In Calaveras County, the board of supervisors is responsible for redrawing district lines.

Public comments are still being encouraged, and questions and comments can be submitted via email at Redistricting@co.calaveras.ca.us or by phone at (209) 754-6376. Written public comments and paper

community of interest maps can also be submitted to the Calaveras County Registrar of Voters Office, 891, Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas, CA 95249.

Two post-draft map public hearings will be held in the board of supervisors chambers on Oct. 12 and Oct 26, and the public is encouraged to attend and provide input.

The online "community mapper" tool, which allows the public to submit communities of interest online, as well as the draft map, can be viewed at <https://calaveras-gis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/CrowdsourceReporter/index.html?appid=c791166d02b34a0b9ee3f1f73906853e>

To learn more about the redistricting process, visit the county's website at elections.calaverasgov.us/Redistricting.

Stanislaus County to leave Mountain-Valley emergency medical services agency

Noah Berner / The Calaveras Enterprise / October 4, 2021

At a board of supervisors meeting on Sept. 28, District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli announced that Stanislaus County will be withdrawing from Mountain-Valley Emergency Medical Services Agency (Mountain-Valley EMSA) on June 30, 2021.

Mountain-Valley EMSA is a joint powers authority made up of Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa and Stanislaus counties that coordinates and regulates local emergency services.

The board of directors is composed of a member from each county, and Tofanelli is the chairperson of the board and the representative for Calaveras County.

The agency contracts with ambulance providers and air ambulance providers, certifies and provides training for EMTs and paramedics, certifies trauma levels at hospitals, and provides monitoring and oversight of ambulance service.

Funding for the agency comes through grants from the state, as well as various fees for services provided. Because funding from the state is based on population, the bulk of the agency's state funding comes through Stanislaus County.

While Calaveras County's contribution for the \$1.6 million current year budget is about \$20,000, Stanislaus County's contribution is about \$245,000.

The majority of the fees collected also come from Stanislaus County, where significantly more services are provided.

"Most of the ambulance service is within that county," Tofanelli said at the meeting. "It's going to be a major financial hit to Mountain-Valley EMSA to be moving on with the four counties that we have involved right now."

The offices for Mountain-Valley EMSA are currently in Modesto, so a new location will also be needed.

"I've had conversations with that board about moving the current offices into Calaveras County," Tofanelli said. "We're pretty centrally located. I think most of that board agrees that the proper place to put it would be in Calaveras County."

The agency currently employs nine people, but that number will likely come down to three or four, Tofanelli said. Stanislaus County plans to offer employment to all of the agency's current employees.

"We are in dire need here to really quickly start our recruitment period," Tofanelli said.

To address the departure of Stanislaus County, Mountain-Valley EMSA has created two committees. One committee is focused on recruiting new employees, finding a new location for the offices and looking into generating revenues for the move, while the other committee is looking into recruiting additional counties to Mountain-Valley EMSA.

"There's two counties that expressed some possibilities of joining Mountain-Valley when Stanislaus leaves," Tofanelli said. "I can't say those counties right now because we don't have an ongoing situation with them."

The agency has \$1.5 million in reserves, which will help with the transition, Tofanelli said.

"We do have a reserve, which is going to help tremendously over the next three or four years," he said. "Financially, we're OK to start with. My concern is long-term—moving forward long-term and how we're going to sustain services we provide on a budget without having counties themselves putting general funds into it."

Tofanelli said that it is unclear how Mountain-Valley EMSA's current contracts with ambulance providers in Stanislaus County will be sorted out.

"Whether those contracts go with Stanislaus County, or they stay with Mountain-Valley, is at issue," he said. "Until that part of it's settled, it's a tough situation."

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**The high Sierra received it's first dusting of snow
this season!**



Eagle meadow (c) yosemitenorthphotography.com

Regional News

[KNP Complex fire triggers flurry of evacuations, as flames threaten more giant sequoia trees](#)

LA Times / October 1, 2021

The 51,000-acre KNP Complex fire tearing through the Sequoia National Park triggered a flurry of evacuations Friday morning, as flames — spurred by a drying trend — threatened communities and burned toward more giant sequoias.

A spot fire ignited across the North Fork Kaweah River, along the northwestern end of the blaze, growing to about 600 acres by the following morning, fire officials said.

As crews focused on battling the spot fire, an evacuation order on Friday morning was issued for the communities of Grant Grove, Wilsonia and Cedar Grove in Kings Canyon National Park — near where towering giant sequoia rise and park staff live, according to Cassie Adams, a spokesperson for the fire. Non-fire personnel

are required to leave the areas by 2 p.m.

Around the same time, Tulare County Sheriff's Office issued its own mandatory evacuation orders for the communities of Big Meadows, Weston Meadows and Quail Flat in the Giant Sequoia National Monument. Those evacuating should travel westbound on Highway 180, authorities said.

Additional orders and warnings went out Thursday as fire activity in the north picked up. Authorities placed the communities of Eshom and Hartland Camp in Tulare County under mandatory evacuation. Fresno County issued its first warnings — for the Miramonte/Pinehurst area. More evacuation information can be found on the Tulare County Sheriff's Office Facebook page, the Fresno County Sheriff's Office Facebook page and the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks Facebook page.

It's believed that flames from the KNP Complex are burning in — or passed through — 11 sequoia groves, though details about the extent of the damage remain scant, said Christy Brigham, head of resource management and science for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

One massive tree in the famed Giant Forest recently toppled over after burning for several days, splaying across a road.

"Unfortunately we did lose one giant, but 99.9% of them look fine," Mark Garrett, a spokesperson for the fire, said of the other trees in the grove.

The KNP Complex fire — one of two lightning-sparked blazes tearing through the southern Sierra Nevada — had seared 51,596 acres and was 20% contained Friday morning. To the south, the Windy fire — which has destroyed more than a dozen homes — was 89,804 acres and 40% contained. Both blazes erupted Sept. 9 amid a massive lightning storm.

Containment for the twin fires has risen significantly in recent days. Cooler temperatures and higher humidity dampened fire activity, allowing firefighters to wage more direct attacks and firm up containment lines.

But a drying trend already underway is forcing temperatures up and humidity down — conditions expected to spur more aggressive fire behavior.

"Those fuels, that stored energy on the ground ,from grass to timber — it's just marinating in that dry air," said Jeff Shelton, a fire behavior analyst with the Windy fire, during a Friday morning briefing. "And so without moisture in the fuels, the fire is able to move through it and just translate as energy all the way across the landscape unimpeded."

The Windy fire has torn through rugged landscape across the Sequoia National Forest and Tule River Indian Reservation, burning into communities and groves of towering giant sequoia trees across the large burn area.

At least 14 homes and a dozen other minor structures were lost, primarily in the Sugarloaf and Long Meadow areas, fire officials said.

The fire has seared several groves of giant sequoias, killing at least 30 trees in its fiery path, said Garrett

Dickman, a botanist assigned to the fire who counted the fatalities himself. An aerial assessment, to be conducted once weather permits, is likely to reveal much greater devastation, he said.

Dickman was recently joined by a sequoia task force — a group of dedicated personnel who are helping to prep sequoia for incoming flames and triage those impacted by fire, by hosing them down and putting out blazes that may spring up around their bases.

"My goal is just to work through as many of the groves that we can get to," he said on Friday, adding that they were planning on hitting Red Hill grove and beginning work on part of Black Mountain grove.

Reimagining city design is crucial to tackling climate change, experts say

Andrea Januta / Reuters IMPACT / October 5, 2021

Addressing climate change will require reimagining urban planning and design, speakers at the Reuters Impact conference said, discussing ways that buildings and cities could evolve.

"It's about reminding ourselves that we all have a shared responsibility to ensure that we use less resources," said architect and chair of the Quality of Life Foundation, Sadie Morgan. "We just have to be open to new ways of living."

When designing new structures, for instance, architects should think about how the buildings can be deconstructed and recycled at the end of their life cycle, or transformed for other purposes, said Morgan. City planners can create more places for people to gather and socialize without needing cars.

But drastic shifts in how cities operate - such as transforming the use of cars - cannot come from architects alone and would need the work of politicians, she said.

About 56% of people worldwide live in cities, yet urban areas are responsible for an estimated three-quarters of global CO2 emissions. Buildings and transport are among the largest sources of urban emissions - including emissions from cars, building construction, heating and cooling systems and lights.

The importance of cities in efforts to slow climate change continues to grow, with just over two-thirds of people expected to live in urban areas by 2050, according to U.N. estimates.

Density was necessary for the future sustainability of cities, said architect and urban planner Stefano Boeri, but density without variety was a "nightmare". As cities expand, planners needed to find ways to encourage richness of function as well as culture, he said.

Boeri also emphasized incorporating nature into city design. "Living nature is not something that is outside our body, outside our house, outside our cities," he said. "We have to redefine our relation, a new balance between the human sphere and the living nature sphere."

(Reporting by Andrea Januta; Editing by Alex Richardson)

Fire retardant could be 'game-changer' in fighting wildfires

Keith Ridler / AP / October 5, 2021

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — U.S. officials on Tuesday approved a long-lasting fire retardant that could significantly aid in fighting increasingly destructive wildfires by stopping them before they ever start.

The U.S. Forest Service approved Perimeter Solutions' fire retardant that is intended to be used as a preventative measure and can last for months.

It's similar to the company's red-dyed retardant dropped from aircraft while fighting active wildfires, but it's clear and sprayed by ground-based workers and equipment.

"The real game-changer here is once you treat it, you can forget it," said Edward Goldberg, chief executive officer of St. Louis, Missouri-based Perimeter Solutions. "It's there for the whole year."

The company said its primary use will be by industrial customers such as utility companies and railroads, but it can also be used to protect residential and commercial properties. It's intended to be sprayed on vegetation, not homes themselves, but can be sprayed on such things as wood fences.

The company's existing retardant is also used for that purpose, but can be problematic because it's only effective until rain washes it away. Goldberg said the new product will remain effective even after a couple inches of rain, making the one-and-done application less expensive.

Cost, Goldberg said, depends on the topography and ranges from \$7,000 to \$15,000 per mile (1.6 kilometers) covering a 20-foot (6-meter) -wide strip.

Goldberg said the product will likely be most effective in the drier climate of the U.S. West, and could be applied in the spring to offer fire protection throughout the wildfire season. In July, it was applied to the grounds at former President Ronald Reagan's coastal mountain ranch in the Santa Ynez mountains in California near Santa Barbara.

The company also said the new fire retardant had been applied at the start of the wildfire season along a fire-prone, 4-mile (6.5-kilometer) stretch of California's Route 118. That resulted in no fires that season, the company said, after the previous fire season saw 37 fires start along the same stretch of road.

Stanton Florea, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service based at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, said the agency had no comment about it's approval of the Perimeter Solutions' fire retardant.

Goldberg said the new retardant has the potential to reduce the overall number of wildfires, freeing up firefighters that have been in short supply in recent years.

The fire center on its website said that so far this year, about 46,500 wildfires have burned 10,000 square miles (26,000 square kilometers). Those numbers are at roughly the 10-year average for number of wildfires and area burned.

Currently, there are 52 large wildfires, 18 of them in Idaho, nine in California and nine more in Montana.

The center is currently at National Preparedness Level 3, having dropped down from the maximum level 5 earlier this year when resources for fighting wildfires were hard to come by.

The center said that cooler, more favorable weather will pass through much of the Western U.S. in the next several days, but that drought conditions still leave the region open for continued wildfire potential.

Inside America's broken supply chain

David Lynch / The Washington Post / October 2, 2021

The commercial pipeline that each year brings \$1 trillion worth of toys, clothing, electronics and furniture from Asia to the United States is clogged and no one knows how to unclog it.

This month, the median cost of shipping a standard rectangular metal container from China to the West Coast of the United States hit a record \$20,586, almost twice what it cost in July, which was twice what it cost in January, according to the Freightos index. Essential freight-handling equipment too often is not where it's needed, and when it is, there aren't enough truckers or warehouse workers to operate it.

As Americans fume, supply headaches that were viewed as temporary when the coronavirus pandemic began now are expected to last through 2022.

Dozens of cargo vessels stuck at anchor off the California coast illustrate the delivery disruptions that have become the signature feature of the recovery, fueling inflation, sapping growth and calling into question the global economic model that has prevailed for three decades.

Today's twisted supply chain is forcing companies to place precautionary orders to avoid running out of goods, which only compounds the pressure. Consumers are confronting higher prices and spot shortages of cars, children's shoes and exercise gear, as the holiday shopping season looms.

"It's going to get worse again before it gets better," said Brian Bourke, chief growth officer at SEKO Logistics. "Global supply chains are not built for this. Everything is breaking down."

Fallout from the once-in-a-century health crisis is the chief culprit behind soaring freight bills and delivery delays. Americans trapped at home slashed spending at restaurants, movie theaters and sporting events and splurged on goods such as laptops and bicycles, triggering an import avalanche that has overwhelmed freight channels.

But the pandemic also exposed weaknesses in the nation's transport plumbing: investment shortfalls at key ports, controversial railroad industry labor cuts, and a chronic failure by key players to collaborate, according to interviews with more than 50 individuals representing every link in the nation's supply chain.

"It's like an orchestra with lots of first violins and no conductor. . . . No one's really in charge," said Fran Inman, a Los Angeles-based commercial real estate executive who has advised government agencies on supply issues.

Port of Los Angeles

On Sept. 1, 40 container ships belonging to companies such as Hyundai, NYK Line and Evergreen were anchored off California, waiting for a berth. (Less than three weeks later, the number reached 73.) Some vessels sit for two weeks or more, effectively cutting capacity on trans-Pacific shipping lanes and driving up costs.

"From an economic point of view, it's a disaster because cargo is waiting," said Markus Grote, captain of a Hapag-Lloyd container ship.

For goods to move seamlessly from overseas factories to American addresses, the oceangoing vessels, shipping containers, cargo terminals, truckers, chassis providers and railroads all must work together, like runners in a relay race. If equipment gets stuck at any point, delays ripple along the entire chain.

Yet the United States is "decades behind" foreign ports in getting carriers, terminals and shippers to provide each other access to commercial data for planning purposes, said Gene Seroka, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles. Concerns over data privacy, business secrets and security have resulted in a fragmented approach. Individual ports operate as separate fiefdoms rather than as part of a national system.

In the Dutch city of Rotterdam, Europe's largest port, everyone involved in a cargo vessel's arrival sees the same information on a common data-sharing platform. Called "PortXchange," the software makes port calls "smarter and more efficient" than the use of separate systems or the telephone, according to the port's website.

Seroka touts a tool called the Port Optimizer, which forecasts three weeks of incoming cargo. More information sharing - including over a longer time period - would allow carriers, terminals, truckers and dockworkers to better position equipment and people. But other than Los Angeles, New Orleans is the only U.S. port that is even testing the system.

"Information sharing and additional transparency is one of the few areas where indisputably we could get more capacity out of the current system," said Dan Maffei, chairman of the Federal Maritime Commission.

To be sure, the United States is importing historic amounts of goods. The L.A. port expects this year to handle a record 10.8 million containers. To keep pace, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union has accelerated training of new workers. Twenty union members have died of covid-19 while working through the pandemic, the union said.

"Our members are tired. Our members are feeling the pain of these covid deaths," said Mike Podue, president of ILWU Local 63. "We're lucky there hasn't been a major accident."

When the supply chain works, goods flow continuously, as if borne along by a river. Today, one bottleneck follows another. The problems are especially acute on the Asia-to-U.S. trade route.

Once a berth becomes available, longshoremen operating massive blue cranes lift the metal containers and position them to head inland via truck or train.

Ideally, a truck driver who has been alerted to the presence of a customer's goods arrives at a terminal to find a chassis waiting. The container is then hoisted aboard and the driver pulls the chassis to the customer's warehouse.

But too often, congestion elsewhere keeps the port jammed. Shippers with full warehouses won't dispatch drivers to collect additional containers. Many loaded chassis sit outside overstuffed warehouses for days waiting to be unloaded, leaving ports short of needed equipment.

Even as cargo piles up on the docks, almost a third of the port's night-shift appointments for truckers go unfilled.

At APM Terminals, the largest container site in the Western Hemisphere, the air echoes with truck horns, air brakes and the warning beeps of mobile cranes.

This 484-acre facility boasts 12 miles of railroad tracks, linking the docks to points east for customers such as Walmart, Nike and Ikea. Across from the headquarters building, trucks wait to navigate canyons of containers stacked about 50 feet high.

Steven Trombley, the facility's managing director, needs the agility of a hockey goalie to ward off the daily complications. Today, his berths are full and four of the ships loitering in San Pedro Bay are impatient for a spot.

Trombley has nearly a week's worth of truck chassis on the dock. But truckers are scarce. Such mismatches help explain why containers destined to travel by rail sit dockside for an average of eight days, up from two before the pandemic.

"It's a headache. Cargo is sitting here longer than planned," Trombley said. "If I don't get the cargo moving, then the next ship is not going to have space."

Even as total federal ports spending has increased, the L.A. gateway has been neglected, Seroka said. West Coast ports, including the L.A.-Long Beach complex, which handles about 36 percent of U.S. imports, have lagged East and Gulf Coast facilities over the past decade, \$11 billion to \$1 billion.

With more money, the port could have expanded channels, fortified wharves and improved road and rail links, he said.

One shortcoming: The lack of a direct rail connection to the distribution centers for companies such as Amazon and Nordstrom 75 miles east in California's "Inland Empire."

Advocates of a rail link say it would eliminate from Southern California's freeways thousands of daily truck trips and ease port congestion by moving millions of containers off the docks. But the railroads doubt the financial case.

The backlog got so bad last fall that port officials opened overflow lots to store thousands of containers

APM Terminals, Los Angeles.

At Pier S, on the other end of a harbor island from APM, about 7,300 containers and chassis are parked. Some have been sitting for almost three weeks.

One of the facility's users is TRAC Intermodal, the nation's largest chassis operator. CEO Dan Walsh, a wisecracking Australian, said current supply snags reflect Americans' greater reliance upon e-commerce.

"They expect things to come faster, which puts pressure on everyone in the supply chain," he said. "They also expect to be able to return things without cost."

TRAC has spent \$1 billion over the past decade upgrading its 180,000-vehicle fleet for what Walsh calls "the permanent whitewater of daily work."

The company has increased spending by 20 percent this year, adding models that boast GPS locators, LED lights and antilock brakes. But expanding more aggressively to meet the cargo emergency would not be cost effective: new tariffs have made Chinese models unaffordable at a time when domestic makers struggle to fill orders.

As demand for shipping has soared, carriers have grown choosy about what they carry - eschewing hazardous chemicals and heavier products that increase vessel fuel costs. They often decline to send containers inland to collect American farm exports, preferring to rush them back to Asia to capitalize on high eastbound freight rates.

That's why the L.A. port exports three times as many empty containers as full ones.

The seven largest publicly traded ocean carriers - including companies such as Maersk, COSCO and Hapag-Lloyd - reported more than \$23 billion in profits in the first half of this year, compared with just \$1 billion in the same period last year.

The soaring freight bills that fueled those profits, however, have put smaller shippers at a disadvantage to giants like Wal-Mart or Amazon. The biggest companies not only can more easily absorb higher costs. They also negotiate more attractive contracts in the first place, which means they can reliably get their goods across the ocean while smaller companies struggle.

National Tree, a maker of artificial Christmas trees, was able over the past three months to import only half as many containers as planned, CEO Chris Butler said.

"We had contracts to bring in all of our containers. Those contracts were not worth the paper they were written on," he said.

Supply interruptions first hit the United States in early 2020, as Chinese factories closed amid coronavirus shutdowns. Shortages of Clorox wipes, masks and other medical goods have evolved since then into a kaleidoscope of scarcity, with appliances, toys, industrial parts and semiconductors all proving hard to find.

Now, persistent cargo concerns are exposing the risks of ocean-spanning supply lines and hyper-efficient "just-in-time" production strategies that keep inventories and costs low.

A shortage of computer chips has shuttered General Motors and Ford auto plants and left Whirlpool scrambling to keep refrigerators and dishwashers in stock. Congestion in California prompted Levi Strauss to reroute Asian cargoes to less crowded East Coast ports despite longer, costlier journeys.

Cargo carriers are offering expedited VIP service for truly desperate shippers, some of whom offer to pay any price to get their goods moving.

Craig Grosscart, SEKO's senior vice president for global ocean, said one desperate shipper recently asked: "Do you take bribes?"

Others have pleaded to use helicopters to retrieve containers from vessels offshore.

Long before the coronavirus, the United States lagged other major economies in moving goods efficiently. In 2018, the World Bank ranked the U.S. 14th out of 160 countries, down from ninth four years earlier, based on a periodic survey of freight forwarders and cargo carriers.

Likewise, regulators with the FMC warned in 2015: "Congestion at ports and other points in the nation's intermodal system has become a serious risk factor to the relatively robust growth of the American economy and to its competitive position."

Those earlier backlogs were sparked by unrest over a West Coast dockworkers' contract. With that deal scheduled to expire July 1, businesses in coming months will probably order more than normal to avoid being caught short again, further aggravating congestion, executives said.

Seeler Industries in Joliet, a maker of chemical solutions used in household cleaners and municipal water treatment facilities, has been forced to turn down several million dollars in orders because of shortages of key ingredients and truckers to move them.

CEO Steve Seeler, who calls that a "significant" hit for his family-owned business, said he buys whatever materials become available for fear of missing out. Some imported chemical ingredients that once took six weeks to arrive now take up to three times as long, making just-in-time production "much more difficult, if not impossible," he said.

Asked to describe his current strategy, Seeler said: "We're praying. That's what we're doing."

Union Pacific rail yard, Joliet, Ill.

One of the main rail routes leaving the port leads to Union Pacific's Global 4 facility in Joliet, which sprawls across the equivalent of 500 football fields.

The rail yard is essentially an inland version of the terminals in Los Angeles. Like an industrial Lego set, the lot is replete with towering walls of orange, green, white and blue containers.

Last year, as the economy rebounded from its spring plunge, cargo arrived faster than it could be pushed out of the gate. This summer, the problem suddenly became acute, with nearly 8,000 containers clogging the paved ramp, roughly double the July 2020 figure, according to Union Pacific.

At one point, trains trying to enter the yard were backed up for 25 miles.

Frustrated truckers would drop containers at random spots, making it harder to navigate the narrow aisles and slowing operations. In late August, nearly all of the 5,500 parking spots were occupied by chassis or containers waiting to be picked up, leading to grumbling that shippers were using the yard as a warehouse.

"When things like this happen, the train can't get loaded and we're wasting hours of service," said Thomas Moses, 49, a veteran locomotive engineer.

The normal 3.5-day cycle for a chassis to exit with a container and then return for another pickup stretched to 17 days. That slowdown meant the facility would need an unimaginable 6,000 chassis for normal operations, up from its customary 1,000. Those delays, in turn, meant more train crews were needed. That takes time to assemble and adds cost.

In July, Union Pacific took the extraordinary step of temporarily halting all trains arriving from West Coast ports. In Los Angeles, Seroka said he was informed of the decision just one or two days in advance.

The railroad also reopened another yard, Global 3, which had been closed in 2019 under a strategy known as "precision scheduled railroading," to act as a relief valve. Used throughout the industry, PSR is "intended to benefit customers" by providing more predictable service, according to Union Pacific.

But union representatives and regulators question the associated job cuts. Union Pacific's 31,000-person payroll is more than one-third smaller than it was in 2015, part of a broader shrinkage across all major railroads.

"You take that many people out of the workforce, I don't see how it could but impact service," said Martin Oberman, chairman of the Surface Transportation Board. "What's happening is just stripping down the workforce."

Global 4 has reopened to incoming trains at 75 percent of its previous volume. A planned doubling of capacity, with the introduction of five massive new cranes, is scheduled for next year.

Union Pacific says it has reduced the number of stockpiled containers. Managers have compiled pandemic lessons into a crisis manual known as "the playbook" and are hiring again.

Ongoing efficiency studies aim at additional fine-tuning. Already, the railroad is installing uniform signage at all Union Pacific facilities, so that truckers will see familiar instructions no matter where they go.

"We've got it fluid," said Drew Steinkamp, general manager of the Chicago service unit. "But we've got a constant volume coming at us."

Alvaro Ramirez has learned to be patient. Sitting in his green-and-white Freightliner truck, stuck in line for hours at cargo depots, the veteran driver listens to Conan O'Brien comedy routines, self-help audiobooks and tai chi lessons.

"It helps me breathe and calm down," said Ramirez. "I used to be a screamer."

He had good reason. Ramirez is almost 2,100 miles from the Los Angeles port, where dozens of ships wait offshore. But he confronts the same dysfunction.

With global supply lines in an epic snarl, it can take him five hours to enter a Chicago-area rail yard, locate a customer's shipping container and mount it on a truck chassis before hauling it to its destination. Chronic rail-yard traffic jams last so long that he has learned salsa dancing by watching videos on his phone while waiting.

Before the pandemic, Ramirez, 44, could make seven round trips in an 11-hour workday. That number fell to just one or two, forcing him to switch to the less crowded overnight shift. Still, his earnings are down 20 percent.

Ramirez is a "drayman," a 16th-century term for the final cog in the 21st-century supply lines that link the American heartland to Asian factories. His daily plight shows how today's disruptions feed on themselves, like a line of tumbling dominoes.

At Road One Intermodal, which employs Ramirez and provides trucking services at nearly 90 ports and terminals, a truck was out of commission for more than two months while the company suffered its own supply chain woes, waiting for a new clutch.

Even as business boomed, executives opted not to order new truck cabs, after learning they could not be delivered until the end of next year. A shortage of aluminum and factory labor made the schedule for new trailers even more uncertain, said David McLaughlin, Road One's chief operating and financial officer.

"This is my 46th year in the business. I've never seen anything like this and it's not easily resolved," he said.

In July, when two of the nation's largest railroads restricted shipments from the West Coast to their Chicago hubs, they reduced the backlog of containers jamming their facilities but made port congestion worse.

As space aboard freight trains grew scarce, shippers switched to trucks, driving over-the-road freight bills up by 85 percent compared to April 2020, according to DAT Solutions.

But many logistics companies are reluctant to add permanent capacity, fearing they will be caught with too many ships, trucks or chassis (the trailer-like frame that holds the containers) once consumer buying patterns return to normal.

"You don't build a church for Easter and Christmas. You build it for the average week," said Jason Hilsenbeck, president of Load Match, an equipment clearinghouse in Naperville, Ill.

American Sale warehouse, Tinley Park, Ill.

The supply chain ends at Bob Jones's door in Tinley Park, Ill., more than 7,700 miles from the Chinese port of Ningbo, where many of his products originate.

The president of the American Sale retail chain is one of the smaller shippers buffeted by supply chain tumult. With eight stores in the Chicago area, Jones imports annually about 150 containers of pools and patio furniture. (Walmart, the nation's largest importer, according to the Journal of Commerce, brings in several hundred thousand.)

Before the pandemic, the cost of shipping one container to his 200,000-square-foot warehouse was less than \$5,000. In late August, the bill hit \$26,000.

Some of his containers sit for two or three weeks once they reach Union Pacific's rail yard or a similar facility belonging to rival BNSF.

Jones passes some of the higher cost to consumers and absorbs some himself. Since Americans have stocked up on outdoor products during the work-from-home era, he makes up some of his losses on volume.

The uncertainty is his chief worry. Kinks in the supply chain mean he has summer products arriving now when summer is a memory on the shores of Lake Michigan. More out-of-season goods will reach the Midwest as the snow flies.

"We have a typical supply chain route. This year, there've been hiccups all along the way," Jones said. "It's not getting better. In fact, I would say it's getting worse."

Sierra Nevada
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Newsletter
for September/October



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