

New park boss faces dissent as he implements valley plan

Tollefson must finish the first 15 projects to reduce the impact of visitors by fall 2004.

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

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YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK -- New Yosemite Superintendent Michael Tollefson is embracing public policy more literally than any other park boss in two decades.

He plans to live only a year amid the postcard views of Yosemite Valley, then move outside the park. He's setting an example by getting out of nature's way in the valley.

"The [Yosemite] Valley Plan says we need to focus development outside the park," said the 55-year-old National Park Service veteran who has been on the job five weeks. "There are great opportunities to get housing outside the park."

The last superintendent to live outside the park was Robert Binnewies, who did it in 1980 when officials were struggling to frame the issues Tollefson faces today.

Binnewies' core dilemma from two decades ago remains: Officials must reduce the impact of people in the 1-mile-wide, 7-mile-long valley while still allowing the public to see such sights as Half Dome, El Capitan and Yosemite Falls.

That's the mission for Tollefson, who in early January replaced David Mihalic. Mihalic retired from the Park Service rather than accept a job-swap transfer to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where Tollefson had been superintendent for two years.

Tollefson enters Yosemite with clear marching orders, thanks to 20-plus years of study, sweat and negotiation by others. He must finish the first 15 valley projects by fall 2004. He has more than \$105 million for the work.

Tollefson is inviting the public to learn about the projects at an open house from 2 to 6 p.m. Feb. 26.

The larger task of completing hundreds of projects in the valley plan will be addressed in the coming years. The full cost of the valley plan is about \$440 million.

During Tollefson's first year, visitors will probably see lots of movement as workers realign trails and remove restrooms at high-profile Yosemite Falls, the site of a \$12.5 million restructuring.

Yosemite spokeswoman Deb Schweizer said the parking lot near the falls will probably be closed in April and the bus drop-off site for visitors will be moved down the road. The trail approaching the falls from the east is being rebuilt now to be accessible for wheelchairs.

As with almost any major project in Yosemite, not everyone likes the idea. Lloyd Morrissey, a visitor from San Francisco, said he likes the area the way it is.

"This doesn't sound like it's worth the money," said Morrissey, 37, who was touring Yosemite with his wife, Stacey, 45, on Valentine's Day. "I think it's fine the way it is. Why spend that much money on this?"

Tollefson will face differences of opinion from many angles -- gateway communities, American Indians, Congress, businesses and environmentalists.

For instance, environmentalists are questioning the \$14 million replacement of the diesel shuttle-bus fleet in the Valley. They point out that California considers diesel exhaust to be more than an air pollutant -- it is considered toxic.

But Tollefson said he is leaning toward diesel-electric hybrid engines, which would reduce emissions dramatically over the older diesels. The buses have both a diesel engine and an electric motor, operating as much as possible on the clean-running electric motor.

"Why not use propane, instead of diesel?" asked George Whitmore, chairman of the Sierra Club's Yosemite Committee. "I've written a letter to the park about diesel buses. Propane hybrids would be cleaner."

Propane would be too expensive and impractical at this point, said park spokesman Scott Gediman. He said the park is not equipped to maintain and support propane-powered vehicles.

Tollefson added that he believes new diesel engines and fuels are much cleaner.

"The diesel-electric hybrid seems to be the power source of choice now," Tollefson said. "The goal is to get people to park their cars and ride the shuttles to reduce emissions and noise."

Transportation issues are familiar for Tollefson, who confronted them regularly at Great Smoky Mountains, a park that straddles the Tennessee and North Carolina state line.

Great Smoky has more than double the number of annual visitors that Yosemite has -- about 9 million compared to 3.4 million. The number of people actually passing through Great Smoky is double the reported recreation figure because people use the park's main road to travel between Tennessee and North Carolina.

Great Smoky's smog problems rank it among the worst national parks for air quality, well beyond Yosemite's problems.

"On a busy day, you might wait three or four hours to go 11 miles," Tollefson said. "We need to avoid anything like that here."

Tollefson's background also includes a five-year stint at Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks, where old rental cabins and structures were successfully removed at Giant Forest in the mid-1990s. The removals helped preserve 2,000-year-old giant sequoias.

Overnight accommodations were moved several miles away to Wuksachi Village, where the National Park Service spent more than \$50 million on a new development. Tollefson encountered little opposition to the Giant Forest changes.

But Sequoia-Kings Canyon, with only 1.7 million visitors annually, is not in the same international spotlight as Yosemite. For example, Tollefson will have to face high-profile opposition -- namely Rep. George Radanovich, a Mariposa Republican -- to reduce parking spaces and campsites in Yosemite Valley.

"People pay a lot more attention to Yosemite," said the Sierra Club's Whitmore. "There's so much pressure for access to Yosemite Valley. He's going to have to expect more conflict here."

Got Pollution?

Air Board Seeks Good Numbers On Dairy Emissions
Valley Voice Newspaper, Week of February 17, 2003



San Joaquin Valley - Farmers are getting hammered these days over air pollution. Blamed for the apparent worsening smog problems in the Valley - the finger pointing by environmental groups, citizens, news media and the government now permeates everyone's thinking - even farmers. Check out the first seminar at this year's World Ag Expo - air emissions - now taking top billing from international trade talks and cooking demonstrations.

While everyone wants the regulators to "do something about it" the state's top air regulators are waiting for some good science to give them some answers - particularly with dairy emissions - a favorite whipping boy in the Central Valley. Obviously a big target because of the massive amount of manure it produces - it is at the same time Tulare County's biggest "cash cow" - our largest industry.

The environmental group The Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment (CRPE) spent the past few years halting the expansion of the industry largely over this issue of dairy emissions and the amount of gases and PM-10 (dust) they pour into our air. While the group cited figures in their arguments and legal challenges based on some kind of science, the conclusion both dairy industry groups and regulators are now agreeing on is that in many cases it was "not good science."

"We've been studying cars and industry smoke stacks measuring air pollution for 20 to 30 years," says California Air Resource Board staffer Patrick Gaffney. "But in the case of dairies and other ag uses its just been in the past few years" that the issue has been on the radar screen.

Gaffney is a top official in the emission inventory branch of the ARB whose task it is to catalogue and offer a best estimate of air emissions in our atmosphere and where they come from "to try to improve our air quality."

Yet with dairy emissions - measuring them is literally a moving target. "You can't just wave a paper bag around and get good numbers," says Fresno State Professor Dr. Charles Krauter who was hired last year by the ARB to give them good science on reactive organic gases (ROGs) - a major contributor to smog. Believe it or not, this valley study that only took its first measurements last October is the first major scientific analysis of these ROGs for dairy cows since 1938.

Still the 1938 study is cited as the source for all current Air Resource Board emission estimates and press assertions that "cows rival cars as smog producers" remains a theme in the current report by the Fresno Bee on valley air quality. The 1938 study itself cites 1890 statutes on methane and estimates that 8% of the methane the cow emits is gas - ROGs. The problem is - that science may be just plain wrong.

So says researcher Dr. Charles Krauter whose initial ROG numbers have just been forwarded to the ARB's Patrick Gaffney for analysis. Regarding the older science based on the 1938 work Krauter says he "doesn't have much confidence in them."

"We have far better equipment now." Krauter says he will need about a year to offer a number to ARB on what an average dairy on a per head basis produces. "At least we believe we've proven that we can do that."

The 1938 survey assumed that 8% of methane a cow gives off was reactive gas - a figure that could be far too high or far too low - but in the newest study ROGs will be measured directly. But Gaffney says what they believe now is that the 8% figure is far too high and that ROGs make up only 1 or 2% of methane emissions.

A dairy cow's contribution could be one quarter of what earlier estimates have claimed.

Suddenly the dairy cow looks less like soot belching diesel semi-truck as a factor in the valley smog problem.

The ARB's Patrick Gaffney says earlier PM-10 numbers assumed for dairy cows in California was reduced this past year as a result of Texas A&M and UC Davis work by a factor of about 4 down from 29 lbs PM-10/1000 head to 6.7 lbs. The best science on ammonia is now part of the state emission inventory based on a 2001 study out of UC Davis at 74 lbs. NH₃/head/year - also about 40% lower than previously estimated, says Gaffney.

Gaffney predicts they will get a full picture of the dairy industry's contribution with the completion of the reactive gases study over the next year thanks to contributions from a number of sources including the ARB, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District, Western United Dairywomen and Fresno State.

Dr. Krauter says he has spent the past 30 years studying ammonia and that's how the ARB came to him to do these current studies. He says "plants pull ammonia out of the air" as they apparently

do with other gases suggesting that a dairy surrounded by crop land may be the best mechanisms to help scrub the air.

The emission numbers will be folded in the California state implementation plan for ozone that California must supply to the EPA to stay in compliance with the Clean Air Act.

Last year the Voice quoted a National Academy of Sciences report on estimating air emissions that suggested the need for new studies.

There is no doubt that ag pollutes and that the 1.1 million dairy cows and the emissions of tons of manure they produce is a problem along with being a great fertilizer. Efforts to manipulate and moderate those emissions are underway in Merced County - SWQ Control Board study on how varying factors like the feed rations and capturing of gases can potentially lower the stink that reduces air quality. Then - maybe the stink over dairies will ease.

"All we're looking for is sound science so my dairymen don't get pushed around" and "forced to clean up pollution" that may not be real, says Western United Dairymen's environmental director Paul Martin. "That's why we are collaborating in this study."

What the dairymen may not want to hear is that they will have to spend money to clean up this problem and that hammer over their heads will likely remain. Also that the pollution cows do produce - even in small quantities - may be more harmful than we thought. In the meantime, experimentation in reductions of air emissions at dairies shouldn't be put on the back burner.

[Visalia Times-Delta Editorial, February 15, 2003:](#)

Clearing the air: Feds should be consistent

It's not enough for Washington, once again, to tell the San Joaquin Valley it needs to get serious about air pollution. Washington itself needs to get serious.

In one respect it is.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency wants California to repeal a 1976 state law that exempts agriculture from local air quality regulations. It wants to clear the way for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to enforce a new program of permits that would include agriculture. The EPA's position is that if the law remains on the books, farm interests could use it to block cooperation with attempts to improve Valley air quality.

The Valley's foul air is a product of many pollution sources, ag burning and farm dust and gasses among them, but the biggest is vehicle emissions, and rumblings from the Bush Administration threaten to help automakers evade a federal law that is the underpinning of California's successes in cutting air pollution from vehicle exhaust over more than 30 years.

The 1970 federal Clean Air Act granted California the right to establish auto emission standards that exceed what the federal government requires in all other states. At the time, California's pollution problems were so much more intractable than those of most other states, and there was no reason to impose draconian California solutions on the rest of the country.

It worked. California was able to set emissions standards that forced auto manufacturers, over their protests, to produce cleaner cars, cleaner in fact than they swore they could produce. The result is that across the state, particularly in Los Angeles County, dangerous auto emissions are down.

Now, however, the auto industry is vowing to challenge a new California law requiring reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in ways that could weaken the 1970 exemption. The automakers appear to be getting support in Washington.

It's going to take a lot to clear our air. It will take local, regional, state and federal efforts, and even individual efforts.

Certainly agriculture needs to recognize its responsibilities. It appears to be beginning to do that. But just as open-ag burning and other farming excesses will inevitably be curtailed, other parts of our communities are going to have to consider their roles.

The regional air board has issued regulations that affect woodburning fireplaces, effectively prohibiting them in new construction. Since dust is a big factor in the mess in our skies, regulations require that grading at construction sites be followed by water trucks.

More will be necessary. Our communities are going to have to promote development in ways that give residents an alternative to the automobile.

Getting to work on foot or on a bicycle is difficult if not dangerous in Visalia. The city is making some tentative steps to construct pedestrian and bike paths. Tulare has finished the Santa Fe Trail, a bike and pedestrian path along the abandoned Santa Fe Railway tracks. In Visalia, abandoned Santa Fe tracks stretch along Santa Fe Street, even over a trestle crossing Highway 198. It's perfectly suited to draw bicyclists and walkers from the neighborhoods that are sprouting in the city's southeast.

Making the Valley livable is going to require a lot from all of us. At all levels of government and at all points in the private arena, it's time to get serious.

[Fresno Bee Editorial, February 18, 2003:](#)

Health, farming do battle over valley's air rules

There is an effort under way in Sacramento to change the rules on agricultural sources of pollution -- or not change them.

The outcome will be a revealing lesson in how the health of people living in the valley stacks up against powerful economic interests, and it will further measure the extent to which our elected representatives are actually prepared to lead.

On the ag side, lobbyists are preparing a bill that would permit local air districts to regulate -- for the first time -- the emissions from diesel engines that are used to power irrigation pumps and other equipment. But other sources of ag pollution would remain unregulated.

Those include dust and particulate matter thrown into the air by plowing, discing and using unpaved roads in rural areas, and organic pollution, mostly from livestock.

Agriculture has enjoyed an exemption from the rules everyone else must follow for more than a half-century. Perhaps that made a sort of sense many years ago, when the air quality problem was less evident and pervasive. But times have changed, and agriculture -- along with everyone else in the valley -- is going to have to make some major changes in the way it conducts its business.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says that ag sources already produce a significant portion of the valley's smog-causing pollution in the summer. And in less than two years, district officials predict, livestock waste will replace motor vehicles as the No. 1 source of the reactive organic gases that make up smog.

Among other things, the bill that emerges from this convoluted political process will tell us much about who calls the shots in state government. Valley legislators may be asked to vote against the wishes of well-funded and powerful constituents -- and friends, in many cases -- in the ag community. Some are understandably reluctant to do so, and may vote, in the end, to preserve an increasingly unhealthy status quo. But if that turns out to be the case, the growing constituency for cleaner air may have the last say.

It won't be easy for farmers and growers to give up a luxury they've enjoyed for so long. It won't be cheap, either. But it will happen. The only question is how. Will agriculture join the rest of the valley community in this effort, enduring a fair portion of the pain for the sake of cleaner air? Or will outsiders force a solution on agriculture -- and the rest of us -- that we may like even less? Setting aside these indefensible exemptions for ag pollution won't be any easier for the Legislature and the governor. But it will be the right thing to do.

[Letter to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian, February 18, 2003:](#)

Asthma centers needed

Weekly, if not daily, concerned citizens raise issue with the increasing toxicity of Bakersfield. People are getting sick in Bakersfield -- asthma, bronchitis, cancer -- because of the increased health hazards from living in such a filthy environment.

Some people are leaving Bakersfield so their families can live in a healthier place. Despite the undeniable health issues, community leaders are still selling out our long-term health for short-term profits.

"Vision" is beyond the dirty brown horizons -- unless you listen to the Planning Commission pseudologic that believes we should expand Bakersfield along the northeast bluffs because they "...are the only places where you don't have smog."

OK, I get it -- let's gridlock and overdevelop this side of town, too, just like Rosedale -- more two-lane roads with no immediate plans to accommodate increased traffic and congestion.

According to the Planning Commission, the environmental impacts of the newly approved northeast housing projects are "minimal" compared to the larger northeast projects being approved. They all add up to this: Bakersfield the toxic wasteland.

But at least we have industrial distribution centers that keep the trucks rolling -- maybe we should build some asthma centers with the same high-volume capacities!

RON JONES, Bakersfield

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee, February 17, 2003:](#)

Farms not the problem

I read the editorial in the Feb. 8 Modesto Bee concerning agriculture and air pollution ("It's time to halt farm exemptions to clean air rules," Page B-7). While I admit agriculture contributes some air pollution, it's not as much as some people think.

For three or four months during the winter, there is little or no agriculture activity. I live 20 miles from Highway 99 and five miles from I-5 and on any day I can see the smog banks from the vehicles traveling the two freeways.

I recommend that once a week you get out of your chair and take a ride out in the country. For every tractor you see in the fields, there are 500 or more vehicles on the roads. Which do you think causes the most pollution, one tractor or 500 or more cars and trucks?

The people of the United States probably spend a smaller percentage of their income on food than any other country. We also export huge amounts of food to other countries. If not for the California farmer and his tractors, you would be buying food imported from other countries that have no controls on what can be sprayed on their fields. Then you can really complain about pollution.

DAVID J. SILVA
Los Banos

[Letters to the Editor, Fresno Bee,](#)

Be careful with air

By Isaac Alvarez
Age 13, Fresno
(Published Monday, February 17, 2003, 4:55 AM)

I go to Ahwahnee Middle School. I think the people in Sacramento should start to do something about the bad air we have in Fresno.

I think the people in the Bay Area should be more careful about what they burn there. The air from there comes over here and stays to pollute our air. How are people with asthma, like my little sister, supposed to run and play outside? Whenever she starts to play too hard, she will start to cough until she takes her inhaler.

Also, people here should not make a fire on non-burn days.

Fireplaces aren't the Valley's worst pollution sources

By Scottie Giese

Fresno

(Published Saturday, February 15, 2003, 4:15 AM)

I'm a little concerned about the right to use our fireplace. I understand that our air quality is bad due to several factors, including the wood pile fire. I know we have to get the air cleaned up somehow.

However, I don't like the idea of the new law that will force us to use our fireplace only on certain days. You must understand that heater bills are not cheap, and that is the same for almost everyone. What about low-income families and the elderly? They will have trouble paying their bills if they have to use the heater all the time. The money adds up quickly.

So why can't we use the fireplace when we want? It saves a lot of money. Shouldn't we do something about the factories and cars instead? It would be better. We all know they give off much more pollution than fireplaces. I know we can do other things to help the air.

What's reasonable?

By Dave Buchan

Fresno

(Published Saturday, February 15, 2003, 5:03 AM)

On a recent trip to San Jose as I drove on Highway 152 westbound, I noticed piles of tree trimmings from the roadside groves, ready to burn.

Am I unreasonable to think that these trimmings are to be burned by the God-like farming class? Am I unreasonable to say that I resent not using my fireplace when I wish? I don't think that I'm unreasonable. Do you?

'Democratic process'

By Mary Savala & Ann Kaufher

Co-Presidents

The League of Women Voters of Fresno

(Published Saturday, February 15, 2003, 5:03 AM)

A Feb. 2 article in The Bee quoted the Fresno County Council of Governments as not knowing why the Measure C Extension was not approved by the voters last November. There is an answer: lack of public trust and involvement.

Proponents of an extension to the transportation sales tax were reluctant to involve members of the public in the development of the tax proposal. It became apparent early in the process that the concerns of the League of Women Voters and other community interests for air quality and public transportation were not taken seriously. The plan placed before the voters last year was not a plan generated by public interests, but one generated by business and government interests.

The League of Women Voters is committed to a democratic process of full public participation in the development of a future transportation sales tax measure. We are part of a group, the Coalition for Livable Fresno Communities, working toward full public participation in a people's transportation plan that will incorporate air quality mitigation measures and get the needed voter approval.

The democratic process must involve public meetings incorporating participation by diverse groups, such as ethnic and cultural minorities, people with disabilities, seniors and neighborhood organizations, in addition to business and governmental representatives. We hope the Council of Governments will embrace this democratic process beginning with its workshop this spring.

[Letter to the Editor, The Record, February 18, 2003:](#)

Let's build a light rail

Sacramento and San Jose have light rails that fill up completely when in use. What's the matter with Stockton when we also are growing and have many working in the Bay Area.

It is time for a change if you want fewer cars on the freeways. Install a light rail from Stockton to the Pleasanton BART station. From there, it only takes BART 46 minutes to travel to the Embarcadero station in San Francisco.

If we had more people with guts in our town like Alex Spanos, we could get the government to help finance such a project. If there is a will and desire, it can be done. And that would mean more people moving to Stockton.

By David H. Lewis

Stockton