

In The News 04-20-07

AG sues over dairy plans

Allensworth park would suffer, Brown says.

By E.J. Schultz and Sarah Jimenez / The Fresno Bee
Fresno Bee, Friday, April 20, 2007

Tulare County violated state environmental laws in its recent approval of two dairies near the Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park, state Attorney General Jerry Brown charged in a lawsuit filed Thursday.

With more than 12,000 cows, the dairies will generate more than 20 tons of manure a day and 10,000 gallons of waste water, threatening the historic integrity of the park, according to the suit.

"The enjoyment and experiences of visitors to Allensworth State Park will be compromised by the odors, flies and air and water pollution," Brown said in the suit.

Named for a black Civil War hero, the park is a monument to the first and only town in California founded and run by blacks.

The lawsuit seeks to block construction of the dairies and demands that the county revisit the environmental review.

It's the second time in nine years that the state Attorney General's Office has sued the county over dairy regulations.

The county is still reviewing the allegations, but "we feel that we have a very solid environmental review process -- it's the most stringent in the world for dairy operations of this kind," said spokesman Eric Coyne.

The lawsuit, filed in Tulare County Superior Court, is the latest attempt to block the dairies, proposed by Sam Etchegaray of Visalia for land about a mile from the park.

Two environmental groups also filed suit Thursday to block the dairies. And a bill making its way through the state Legislature would ban new dairies from within 2.5 miles of the park, considered by blacks to be sacred ground.

County supervisors have expressed frustration with efforts by Sacramento to intervene in local land-use decisions.

County supervisors approved the dairies in March on a 4-0 vote. But the dairies -- which the county estimates could bring as many as 16,000 cows -- are still months away from being built. Etchegaray must still get air and water permits. He also is considering selling the land to The Trust for Public Land, a private nonprofit whose mission is to conserve natural and historic lands.

David Albers, Etchegaray's attorney, said the lawsuits could affect negotiations with the trust organization, which stepped in at the request of the state Department of Parks and Recreation.

"I think it's certainly bad form and bad faith for the state to sue when Sam Etchegaray has already granted them an option to buy a portion of the property," he said.

In the lawsuit, the Attorney General's Office alleges that the county ignored environmental laws that require special consideration of nearby historical landmarks. The final environmental review "fails to even make mention of the national historical significance of the park," according to the suit.

Brown, in an interview, said "it just doesn't seem that 12,000 dairy cows next to the park makes a lot of sense."

Coyne said county rules call for keeping dairies from locating within 1,000 feet of public parks. The county, he said, went well beyond that by placing the closest Etchegaray dairy a little more than a mile from Allensworth park.

The suit also alleges that the county failed to adequately analyze impacts to air and water, and did not properly consider possible negative consequences for habitat at the nearby Allensworth Ecological Reserve and Pixley National Wildlife Refuge.

Many of the concerns were brought forward by various state and federal agencies, including the state Department of Parks and Recreation.

Separate but similar lawsuits were filed Thursday by the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The county review is "one of the worst environmental impact reports I've seen in a long time," said Joel Reynolds, an NRDC attorney.

County supervisors were at an off-site meeting in Sequoia National Park and not available for comment Thursday. At a state Assembly hearing Wednesday on the dairy buffer zone bill, Supervisor Steve Worthley said prevailing winds would keep dairy smells away from the park. He also said some of the concerns about the project were submitted after the public comment period closed.

In 1999, then-Attorney General Bill Lockyer sued the county over what he called weak environmental standards for dairy projects. A settlement produced stricter rules.

But the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment followed with a lawsuit in 2000, saying the proposed regulations were too lax. The lawsuit stalled dairy approvals for nearly two years.

The county and the organization settled in 2001. Under the agreement, the county required dairy applicants to provide more in-depth environmental documents, including information on cumulative effects on air quality and ground water.

Since 2001, the county has approved 14 new dairies and three amendments to expand existing dairies, said Samantha Franks, a planner with the county's Resource Management Agency.

Prior to the 2000 lawsuit, 58 dairy permit applications were pending approval. Now, 79 await approval, she said. Tulare County is home to more than 600,000 cows on 300 dairies.

TULARE COUNTY

State sues to block dairies near historic black town

Jim Herron Zamora, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, April 20, 2007

California Attorney General Jerry Brown filed suit Thursday to stop construction of two dairies that would bring more than 12,000 cattle within about a mile of Allensworth State Park, a historic black settlement.

"Allensworth State Park will be compromised by the odors, flies and air and water pollution generated by these large dairies in such close proximity," the suit states. "By bringing a large industrial dairy operation into the immediate surroundings of the park, the dairy project threatens the park's historic integrity and its function to convey a historically accurate picture of the way of life of the Allensworth pioneers."

Tulare County spokesman Eric Coyne said the county counsel had not had time to review the suit and issue a formal response.

Brown's lawsuit is just the latest twist in a long battle over the proposed dairies. On Wednesday, the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife committee approved a bill to create a 2.5-mile buffer zone around 2,000 acres where owner Sam Etchegaray proposed the two dairies.

Both the suit and the Assembly bill are attempts to overturn a March 20 decision by the Tulare County Board of Supervisors approving the dairies, about 15 miles from Delano (Kern County) in the heart of a region known for dairy farms.

Etchegaray and his attorney did not return phone calls seeking comment.

Brown's lawsuit says the Tulare County Board of Supervisors violated the California Environmental Quality Act by approving the project "without meaningfully evaluating and identifying the impact on the unique historical resources and setting of Allensworth State Park." Brown estimates the dairies will produce 20 tons of manure and other contaminants each day.

The suit, filed in Tulare County Superior Court, also alleges the Board of Supervisors did not adequately address the project's environmental impacts on the adjacent Pixley National Wildlife Refuge and the Allensworth Ecological Reserve.

Coyne defended the approval process, which included numerous public hearings and an environmental impact report.

"There were many issues raised during the many public hearings, and the board determined that the EIR for the project adequately addressed those concerns," Coyne said.

Brown, in an interview, disagreed.

"This is a massive impact by 12,000 cows, and the county really failed to look at the impact this would have on the park," Brown said. "It's clearly required under state law that you consider the impact. It's an important part of the history of California, and it needs to be preserved."

Tulare County, home to about 350,000 cows and 400,000 people, has an estimated 320 dairies generating more than \$1 billion in revenue. Many residents already live within 2 miles of a dairy, Coyne said.

The park preserves a town that former slave Allen Allensworth founded as an agricultural haven for former slaves and sharecroppers. Allensworth was born into slavery in Kentucky in 1842 but learned to read and write from his master's son and eventually went to college and joined the Army during the Civil War. He is believed to be the first African American to receive the rank of lieutenant colonel.

After he retired in 1906, Allensworth promoted Booker T. Washington's philosophy of African American self reliance and lectured about the need for black people to become self-sufficient. He purchased 800 acres along the Santa Fe rail line in 1908 and extolled the virtues of the new town he built there in black newspapers.

The town grew and eventually had a glee club, sewing circles, chocolate hours and family gatherings. By 1910, it had a school and a judicial district. But after Allensworth's death in 1914, the Santa Fe Railroad relocated its stop, and the town, which was never incorporated, began a rapid decline.

In 1970 the state began purchasing the abandoned town and restoring its buildings. The 240-acre state park, which opened in 1976, includes 23 restored buildings. The state has spent millions of dollars to preserve original buildings and reproduce others from photographs.

The new Assembly bill, authored by Assemblywoman Wilmer Carter, D-Rialto (San Bernardino County), is supported by Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, and the California Legislative Black Caucus.

The bill is opposed by the California State Association of Counties, which urged the state to stay out of local land-use issues.

Núñez wrote the supervisors opposing the dairies and asked Brown to intervene "to protect not only the integrity of Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park but also the integrity of the state's environmental review process."

"I am pleased Attorney General Brown is taking this important action to prevent the environmental degradation of the park property and its environs," Núñez said in a statement.

Núñez spokesman Steve Maviglio said the bill to protect the site would go forward regardless of the outcome of the lawsuit.

State sues county to stop dairies

Attorney general says county failed to weigh effects

By Jake Henshaw, Sacramento Bureau
Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, April 20, 2007

SACRAMENTO - Attorney General Jerry Brown added another hurdle Thursday to the effort to build two major dairies within two miles of Col. Allensworth State Historical Park.

Brown sued Tulare County, alleging that its environmental review of the dairies failed properly to consider their effect on the historical resources and visitor experiences at the park as well as air and water of the park and nearby wildlife habitats.

The suit, filed in Tulare County Superior Court, seeks to throw out the environmental-impact report on the dairies approved by the board of supervisors and to require the board to adopt a revised EIR before the project can proceed.

"By bringing a large industrial dairy operation into the immediate surroundings of the park, the dairy project threatens the park's historical integrity and its function to convey an historically accurate picture of the way of life of the Allensworth pioneers," the lawsuit says.

Tulare County supervisors were at an annual meeting of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Association of California Counties and were not immediately available for comment.

County spokesman Eric Coyne said that "the county counsel has not had a chance to properly evaluate the attorney general's petition.

"Certainly there were a number of issues raised during the many public hearings held to evaluate the project," Coyne added. "However, the board determined that the environmental-impact report for this project adequately addressed those concerns."

Paul Saldana, the executive director of the Tulare County Economic Development, who defended the county supervisors' action as recently as Wednesday in the Capitol, also demurred, saying he wasn't sure what impact the suit would have.

Victor Carter, president of the Friends of Allensworth, welcomed the lawsuit, saying that his group was planning to take their own legal action if the attorney general hadn't.

"Anybody who reads the EIR knows a battle can be won in court because it is not complete," Carter said.

He added that the lawsuit reinforces his group's "only goal, [which is] to protect the park."

"We wanted to put out a broad front, and this completes that," Carter said.

A bill in the Legislature would establish a 2.5-mile protective zone around the park that wouldn't allow the dairies.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, who led a rally Wednesday in favor of this legislation, released a statement endorsing the attorney general's action.

"I am pleased Attorney General Brown is taking this important action to prevent the environmental degradation of the park property and its environs as well as to protect the state's investment in its facilities and the integrity of the [California Environmental Quality Act] process," Nunez said in his statement.

A spokesman said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger "values the cultural and historic significance of Allensworth State Park and is focused on doing what is in the best interests of the park, property owners, and local government."

Schwarzenegger ultimately could play a deciding role in the controversy. If the bill establishing a 2 1/2-mile no-dairy barrier around the park reaches his desk, he could either sign it or veto it.

On March 20, Tulare County supervisors approved an EIR for two dairies with 12,000 cows as proposed by Sam Etchegaray. The dairies would be within 1.5 miles of Allensworth park.

The suit says the proposed dairies are "just barely" outside a one-mile "windshed" boundary surrounding the park, which is the minimum distance allowed between a new dairy and an existing community under county rules. The suit calls this buffer zone "arbitrary."

Further, the lawsuit says the county failed to consider an adequate range of alternatives to the proposed dairies as required by law, such as locating the dairies further away.

Instead, the lawsuit says, the EIR concluded that the two options reviewed weren't feasible "based on an improper reliance on economic considerations."

The lawsuit also charges that the EIR, among other things, uses outdated assumptions on some dairy waste discharges like nitrogen, doesn't include any modeling or projections on the emissions of reactive organic gases and fails to provide "meaningful" analysis of basin-wide air pollution levels.

The suit alleges that the EIR doesn't require adequate steps to reduce air pollution, such as purchases of air pollution offsets or the use of alternative fuels and improperly defers to the State Water Resources Control Board to come up with mitigation measures to minimize the effect of the dairies on water.

Finally, the lawsuit says that despite the historical significance of the park, the EIR doesn't contain any description of the specific public uses of the buildings and other facilities at the park, noting only that they are "unoccupied."

"The [EIR] fails to even make mention of the national historical significance of the park," which is a National Register Historic District, the suit says.

Brown wants the court to vacate and set aside the EIR and related documents approved by the county supervisors, to issue temporary and permanent injunctions to prevent approval of any construction permits or any construction work on the dairies.

The Buzz on Business

Modesto Bee, Friday, April 20, 2007

STATE SUES TO BLOCK DAIRIES: The attorney general sued the Tulare County Board of Supervisors on Thursday to block two mega-dairies from being built next to a state historic park that pays tribute to a black community founded by a freed slave. The approval last month to allow 12,000 cows about a mile from Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park violated the California Environmental Quality Act, Attorney General Edmund G. Brown Jr. said in the lawsuit filed in Tulare County Superior Court in Visalia. The dairies proposed by Sam Etchegaray would produce 20 tons of manure a day - polluting air and water, and creating a stink near the park, the lawsuit claimed.

Around the Region

Stanislaus County

Modesto Bee, Friday, April 20, 2007

ASTHMA FAIR/WALK SATURDAY: People can obtain asthma information and get some exercise at the Stanislaus County Asthma Fair/Walk on Saturday. The activities will be at Sierra View Elementary School, 1323 E. J St. in Oakdale. The walk starts at 9 a.m. Information booths will be open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The event is free. Wallace Carroll, a Modesto allergist, will give presentations on asthma. Health screenings and spirometry (the measuring of lung function) readings will be available. Among the prizes given away will be a HEPA vacuum cleaner. The American Lung Association estimates that 26,808 Stanislaus County adults and 12,580 children are at risk for asthma problems due to poor air quality, and it's estimated that 14,000 children have been diagnosed with asthma in the county. Those interested in participating in the Walk for Asthma or those who need more information about the Asthma Fair 2007 may call the Stanislaus County Asthma Coalition at 558-4846 or 558-4588. Visit the coalition's Web site at www.stanasthma.org.

Green day

Danielle MacMurchy

Tracy Press, Friday, April 20, 2007

An Earth Day celebration is planned for this weekend in Stockton. By Danielle MacMurchy

If you haven't shown a tree your affection lately, Sunday is your chance.

Earth Day is an opportunity for people to enjoy the outdoors and learn how to preserve the environment on a daily basis. About 10,000 people are expected to do just that at the 19th annual EarthDay Festival at Victory Park in Stockton.

Through funky music, vegetarian dishes and educational booths, festival-goers will learn simple ways to live green.

"Just for one day, think about what you're doing and what you can do to take care of the Earth," said Susan Loyko, assistant solid waste manager with the city of Stockton and one of the festival organizers.

A 2½-mile bike ride and parade along the Smith Canal will kick off the all-day festival. The riders dressed in the best Earth-friendly garb will win prizes.

The funky sounds of Bucho, one of Sacramento's most beloved dance bands, will headline the day's earth-friendly lineup. Latin, jazz and soul bands will also entertain throughout the day.

Master Gardner, a countywide volunteer-run program, will talk about how to garden without pesticides. Local dog grooming businesses will share about the importance of dog-waste cleanup. And other organizations will share about recycling, water, [air quality](#) and energy conservation.

Since Loyko first became involved in the festival six years ago, she has seen the country's attitude toward environmental preservation shift.

"We're feeling the repercussions of not taking care of our environment," she said. "It's a reality now."

She encourages people to use products that are made of recycled paper, water the lawn for short intervals and use energy-saving lightbulbs.

"Last year, 10,000 people attended the festival," Loyko added. "If that many people make one behavior change, that's powerful."

The Peace and Justice Network of San Joaquin County launched the first Earth Day Festival. Each year, they partner with University of Pacific, San Joaquin County and the city of Stockton to throw one of the city's most heavily attended festivals.

Motorists' green code -- drive less, ride more

Michael Cabanatuan, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, April 20, 2007

For citizens of the planet who want to limit their role in its degradation, the solution is simple: Drive less, drive cleaner - or don't drive at all.

Motor vehicles are the largest single source of U.S. air pollution, spewing smog-forming gases, microscopic particles, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide into the skies. The manufacture of automobiles and trucks, as well as the refining and distribution of gasoline and oil products, also pollute the air.

"It's not just a science fiction movie," said Luna Salaver, spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, referring to global warming. "There is something we have to do, and that's change our behaviors. There are so many simple changes we can make-- and it's time for people to take individual responsibility."

The biggest change, of course, would be to permanently park that car and rely on public transportation, bicycles and feet to get around. But for many people, such a drastic change would not only be inconvenient but impossible, or at least unreasonable.

Still, experts say, there are ways people can keep their cars and still reduce their impact on the planet:

- Ride transit, walk or bike more.
- Live closer to where you work.
- Drive cleaner and greener.

The Bay Area has, arguably, the best transit network in the western United States. With 32 transit operators-- plus dozens of shuttle systems and several regional connections, including the Capitol Corridor and San Joaquin trains -- it's possible to get almost anywhere. Taking transit, however, can sometimes take longer than driving, involve multiple transfers, long waits, and occasionally long walks.

Still, you won't know until you try, said Stuart Cohen, executive director of the Transportation and Land Use Coalition, a transit lobby.

"The first thing people can do is make a commitment during Earth Week to try out different transit choices," he said. "What we've found is that it takes a lot of personal resolve and energy to change the way you get around. Trips of less than a mile are easily walked and yet a majority of them are often driven."

After that Earth Week trial, Cohen suggested, making a commitment to get out of the car and commute on transit, bike or foot just once or twice a week can make a difference.

"Changing just one trip a week out of the car produces benefits that multiply greatly if enough people do it," he said.

Studies show that taking just a small percentage of vehicles out of the commute can often reduce congestion, Cohen said. So, more people riding transit could reduce the need to spend money on highway expansions. It also cuts global warming emissions.

People who would like a little help in navigating the region's multiplicity of transit agencies can get it from 511 -- the regional traveler information center. In addition to maps and schedules, it offers a trip planner that can direct riders to the best routes for their trips.

With the Bay Area's weather, scenic views and networks of bike and pedestrian trails, it can be fairly easy to get around on bike or foot, especially when those modes of travel are combined with transit.

Experts also suggest that the trend toward infill development -- smart growth -- can reduce the reliance on driving. If people live closer to where they work, shop and socialize, they'll drive less.

"If we want to preserve open space, promote transit usage and more walking, we need to plan for it," said Cohen.

But many parts of the Bay Area, especially east of the East Bay hills and north of the Golden Gate Bridge, lack the transit service and sometimes even the sidewalks that make it easy or comfortable to get around without a car.

"For those folks who live where public transit is less convenient, they need to be a little more creative, to think about how they can make a difference by changing how they travel," Salaver said.

Carpooling or ridesharing is an option, she said, whether through a formally arranged carpool or vanpool, through sharing a ride with a family member or neighbor or using the casual carpool network that has sprung up in the East Bay.

And if commuting by any other means than driving alone doesn't work, Salaver suggested, try giving up the car when going to the dry cleaner, the grocery store or going out to get a cup of coffee.

But even those who don't want to -- or can't -- cut back on their driving can take steps to reduce their impact on the environment. Drivers can reduce their gas consumption by buying cars that get better mileage, keeping their vehicles in top running condition, adjusting their driving behavior to save gas, or choosing vehicles that can use alternative fuels.

Buying green vehicles doesn't necessarily mean buying a hybrid, and buying a hybrid doesn't necessarily mean a driver is doing anything to lessen their impact on the planet, experts said.

Patricia Monahan, deputy director of clean vehicles for the Union of Concerned Scientists, said people buying cars should focus not on whether the vehicle is a hybrid but on whether it has low emissions and is fuel efficient.

Auto dealers are required to post large stickers, known as Monroneys, in the windows of new cars. They list not only the Environmental Protection Agency miles-per-gallon estimates but bar charts showing how a vehicle's emissions compares to average emissions for vehicles in its class. Some cars are labeled as super ultra-low emission vehicles (SULEV), the cleanest on the market, but such labels aren't required, though they will be starting in 2010.

"Now it's incumbent upon the consumer to do their own research," Monahan said. "It takes a pretty savvy consumer to figure it out."

While hybrid vehicles equipped with both electric and gasoline powered engines are all the rage on the green scene, many are no better -- and some are worse -- than some fuel-efficient cars fueled only by gasoline, Monahan said.

"There are hybrids out there that have very good fuel economy -- Priuses and Honda Civics, especially -- but there are other hybrids that just don't," she said.

"Manufacturers can use the extra energy produced from the electrical system to improve fuel efficiency or they can use it for other features like speed and power.

"There are hollow hybrids and there are real hybrids."

The Union of Concerned Scientists operates a Web site, www.hybridcenter.org <<http://www.hybridcenter.org>>, to help green car buyers shop for their next rides.

Alternative fuels have attracted a lot of attention from people who would like to reduce their impact on the environment. A small but growing number of drivers have been buying diesel vehicles and converting them to use biodiesel -- diesel fuel derived from vegetable matter.

Ethanol -- a fuel derived from corn -- has also become more popular. But biofuels, which are typically blended with gasoline, still lack a sufficient distribution network and can be used only in a limited number of cars. There are also long-term concerns about the sustainability of the fuels, which now depend on food crops that require a lot of land. But researchers are continuing to look into biofuels as well as hydrogen fuel cells with increased interest -- and funding.

"We need some big breakthroughs so we can come up with a real alternative fuel," Monahan said.

But even folks who don't buy hybrids or fuel up with biofuels can take some simple steps to make their cars more fuel efficient and less polluting. Experts say that routine vehicle maintenance-- including tuneups, ensuring emissions controls are working and keeping tires properly inflated -- can increase mileage and reduce smog. So can filling up with fuel in the evening, not topping off gas tanks when refueling, and not idling the engine or pumping the gas pedal when starting newer cars.

On the road, accelerating smoothly and slowly, maintaining steady speeds and driving at lower speeds decreases gas consumption. So can removing excess weight -- like unneeded items stashed in the trunk -- and removing rooftop carriers when they're not being used.

Everyone can do something to make a difference, Salaver said.

"If you think: 'Whatever changes I make in how I travel has an impact on the environment and climate change,'" she said, "you can make a difference."

Online resources

- Pick a fuel-efficient car: www.hybridcenter.org, www.epa.gov/greenvehicle, www.epa.gov/otaq .
- Tips about getting around and helping the planet: www.italladdsup.gov.
- Fifty things you can do to help the air: www.arb.ca.gov/html.
- Plan a local trip on a transit route: www.511.org.
- Casual carpooling in the Bay Area: www.ridenow.org/carpool.
- Bike to Work Day: www.bayareabikes.org/btwd/index.php.
- Get rewards for switching to carpooling: www.rideshare.511.org.

Fight car-related global warming emissions

Here are just a few easy ways to still get around while still sparing emissions linked to global warming:

Carpool -- There are a number of formal and informal ways to carpool. The Web site www.ridenow.org has lists of informal carpool sites in the East Bay and San Francisco. You can also spare emissions simply by riding to places with friends. Carpooling regularly can more than halve your transportation-related emissions.

Walk or ride a bike -- It's the emission-free way to go. It's also good for you.

Ride public transit -- It's the obvious answer, but it's also cheaper per mile when you factor in fuel and maintenance costs for your car. The site www.511.org can help you plan transit trips.

Accelerate gradually -- Slamming on the gas burns more fuel and produces more emissions than gradually accelerating.

Obey the speed limit -- Going too fast also wastes gasoline.

Trip link -- Combining many errands on one trip can save time and fuel.

Don't top off the tank -- Spilled fuel turns into emissions than can harm air quality.

Replace your air filter -- Replacing your car's air filter can improve fuel efficiency, sparing the air from unnecessary emissions.

Inflate your tires -- Properly inflated tires can also improve fuel efficiency.

Source: California Air Resources Board

Earth Day: Here are some tips so you can do your part

By Erin Kelly, Gannett News Service

Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, April 20, 2007

WASHINGTON - The polar ice caps are melting, coal-fired power plants spew mercury into the air and Americans still can't swim or fish safely in 40 percent of U.S. waterways. So what can you do about it as we approach Earth Day on Sunday?

Plenty, say government experts and environmentalists.

Global Warming

- Drive smarter. Live as close to your job as possible to reduce your commute and cut down on the amount of gasoline you burn. Keep your car's tires well inflated and your vehicle tuned up to run more efficiently.
- Switch light bulbs. Switch from traditional incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent bulbs to save energy. If every household in America switched just five bulbs, the energy savings would be equivalent to taking 8 million cars off the road, according to the Sierra Club.
- Save energy at home. Buy energy-efficient appliances and electronics that carry the Energy Star label. Make sure your doors and windows are well sealed. Buy a programmable thermostat that allows you to set your heating and air conditioning to use less energy when you're not home. Turn off your computer and monitor when they're not in use. Computer screen savers and slide shows use a great deal of energy. Unplug your TV whenever you leave town. TVs suck up energy even when turned off.
- Use cleaner energy. Many utility companies allow customers to buy "green power" generated by renewable energy such as wind and solar. To find out what's available in your area, go to <http://zoomer.sierraclub.org> and click on "efficiency/renewables."
- Recycle. Make sure to recycle aluminum cans, glass bottles and paper. Creating a new aluminum soda can from recycled materials consumes just 5 percent of the energy it takes to make one from scratch.

Clean Water

- Don't pour pollution down the drain. Take unwanted household chemicals such as cleaning solvents, paint and varnishes to hazardous waste collection centers. If you pour them down the drain, you will make it harder for sewage treatment plants to clean the water before it flows back into rivers, lakes and bays.
- Make your lawn "greener." Don't use chemical fertilizers or pesticides on your lawn and flower beds and don't hire lawn-care services that use them.
- Pick up pet droppings. Waste from dogs and cats runs off yards and streets into storm drains and contaminates waterways.

Clean Air

- Go farther on a gallon of gas. Choose cars that are energy efficient and pollute less.
- Get out of the car. Combine as many errands as possible into one car trip. Avoid waiting in long lines at fast-food restaurants and drive-through banks. Park the car and go inside instead.
- Rake your leaves. Gas-powered lawn mowers, leaf blowers, weed trimmers, chainsaws and snow blowers contribute to air pollution.

Events seeking to tread lightly on environment

Justin Berton, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, April 20, 2007

It used to be that a trip to the local film festival was just a trip to the movies. Now it's a chance to stave off global warming.

Late this month, the San Francisco International Film Festival will "go green," as did the 2007 Academy Awards. The 15-day event, spread across 10 theaters in the city, will sell an estimated 80,000 tickets and create one extra-large environmental footprint: mountains of crumpled popcorn bags, truckloads of plastic water bottles, a sea of toilet flushes. Not to mention the barrels of gasoline burned by patrons making their way to city theaters.

To neutralize the impact, festival organizers will determine the size of the so-called footprint -- the amount of carbon dioxide emitted to make the festival run -- and will purchase renewable energy credits from NativeEnergy, a renewable credit trading company. The company and others like it invest the money from energy credits in green projects, such as wind farms and solar installations, to reduce carbon emissions. These companies have seen a recent spike in "carbon offset" purchases from cultural event organizers seeking to redress the damage they inflict on the environment.

"It used to be only the likely suspects wanted to green their event," said Billy Connelly, a spokesman for NativeEnergy. Connelly estimated that five years ago the company sold carbon offsets for five large environment-conscious events, including the Green Festivals and the Natural Products Expo. Now, because of mainstream awareness of global warming and a surging carbon-offsets market that reached \$100 million last year, Connelly said the company works with hundreds of events annually, including punk rock concerts, an NFL football game and, more recently, private weddings.

"Artists and athletes get this more than the average American consumer," Connelly said. "They seem to understand what the consequences are and what's at stake with creating a solution."

In the cultural climate following "An Inconvenient Truth," Al Gore's documentary on global warming, it's more than fashionable for a cultural gathering to seek out the green stamp of approval; it's moving toward being a requirement.

Local shindigs such as the Mission Creek Music and Arts Festival, the Vans Warped Tour and this summer's All-Star Game at AT&T Park will green up on some level for the first time. This year, Burning Man is asking its estimated 40,000 participants to chip in a \$7 donation toward "Cooling Man" offsets, the second consecutive year the annual arts festival has worked to neutralize the makeshift city it creates in the

Black Rock Desert of Nevada. The trend is spreading fast enough that KQED recently announced that the station purchased enough carbon credits to offset one year of broadcasting at a cost of \$10,000.

Graham Leggat, executive director of the San Francisco Film Festival, said discussions began last year to offset the event. NativeEnergy is still calculating the festival's environmental footprint, so the carbon-offset cost remains unknown. But at the Academy Awards, the Portland, Ore.-based nonprofit Bonneville Environmental Foundation calculated that the one-night soiree produced 250,000 pounds of carbon dioxide, which equaled about 174 "green tags" at a retail cost of \$4,176-- chump change by Tinseltown standards. Bonneville then used the money spent on green tags to finance solar and wind-powered energy.

For the film festival, Leggat said corporate sponsors would kick in to pay for the offsets.

"As filmmakers, we are well positioned in the arts to organize and educate about emerging social issues," Leggat said. "We're often leaders in forward-thinking mentality. This is another facet of that kind of social-issues forward thinking."

Even though some environmentalists have recently criticized offsets as a bogus way to improve air quality, and skeptics chalked up the Academy Awards event as cheap publicity for the celebs, the trend of greening parties continues to grow.

Nadine Weil, a San Francisco consultant who introduced the film festival to NativeEnergy, said in the past month she's been contacted by Major League Baseball to carbon-neutralize this summer's All-Star Game as well as by organizers of the International Children's Games, which will come to San Francisco next year. For Earth Day on Sunday, Weil said she is working with Grace Cathedral to carbon-neutralize the day's service. The church, and its parishioners who travel by car, will produce an estimated 4 tons of carbon dioxide costing \$48.

"A year ago, I was calling people to green their events," Weil said. "Now people are calling me."

Julia Butterfly Hill, the Oakland environmentalist who in 2005 co-authored the "Guide for Greening Events," said the book has helped green 600 events nationwide, most of them in the past year.

Hill said that like a lot of creative approaches to causes, such as a red ribbon to support AIDS patients or a neon-yellow Live-strong band for cancer research, greening events could become popular and then go out of style.

"It's become a trend, but I hope it doesn't become trendy," she said. "Because then it'll just phase back out. I hope we can shift the social consciousness where it becomes the accepted status quo to think, 'Yes, this event has to be green.'"

Jeff Ray, 39, founder and director of the 11-year-old Mission Creek Music and Arts Festival, said this year will be the first time he has addressed the event's environmental impact. Ray, who works in maintenance at Rainbow Grocery, said his reasons were personal.

"I don't want my festival to just be decadent and a time to party," Ray said. "It needs to have more depth. ... I realized I didn't want to be known as a person who just threw good parties."

Ray said he didn't plan to calculate the festival's footprint but would purchase as many offsets as he could afford with money raised at a benefit concert. He also said the sound stage at Dolores Park will be powered by biodiesel fuel.

Krista Canellakis, a partnership manager at San Francisco-based 3 Phases Energy, which sells renewable energy certificates, said in the past year the number of events 3 Phases has coordinated has grown to 10, including a daylong conference at the Ferry Building.

"Growth in greening these events has been parallel to growth in the public dialogue about renewable energy," Canellakis said. "People are realizing their event has an energy footprint and want to offset that."

Leggat predicted the film festival would continue with its green efforts for the long run. "We would imagine we'll keep doing this as long as the environment keeps going to hell in a handbasket," he said.

What is a carbon offset?

Carbon offsets -- sometimes called carbon credits -- put a monetary value on reductions of greenhouse gases. The offsets represent emissions lessened via green projects such as new wind farms, solar installations or simply controlling fossil fuel pollution. The offset is sold through companies that act as brokers or traders. Individuals and businesses can buy the offsets to help reduce their "carbon footprints."

Obama Offers Plan to Cut Gas Emissions

By PHILIP ELLIOTT, The Associated Press

The Washington Post and the Hanford Sentinel, Friday, April 20, 2007

DURHAM, N.H. -- Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama on Friday issued a call to save future generations from global catastrophe as he offered an energy proposal to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

"We've been talking about climate change in Washington for years and energy independence and efficiency for years," Obama said. "But no matter how many scientists testified about greenhouse gases, no matter how much evidence that they're threatening our coasts and endangering our weather patterns, nothing happened with global warming until now."

The Illinois senator stood in front of University of New Hampshire campus buses that run on biofuels.

Obama says the fuel used to power automobiles should contain less of the carbon that contributes to global warming -- enough to make the same impact as taking 32 million cars off the road.

"I believe we still have a chance to pass on a planet to our children that is cleaner and safer and more prosperous than we found it," Obama said. "This is our generation's moment to save future generations from global catastrophe."

Obama's approach echoes California's. The state's Republican governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, issued an executive order this year requiring all fuels sold in the state to contain less carbon. The goal is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from passenger vehicles 10 percent by 2020.

The Obama campaign said its effort would take that plan nationally. Specifically, Obama wants to cut greenhouse gas emissions from cars by 5 percent in 2015 and 10 percent in 2020.

"It will take a grass-roots effort to make America greener and end the tyranny of oil," Obama said two days before Earth Day.

Obama's plan counts on new limits to stimulate increased production of renewable biofuels, such as corn and cellulosic ethanol, which naturally have lower emissions. The plan would create incentives for increased research, investment in cleaner fuels and flexible-fuel vehicles that can run on ethanol.

The campaign says a national fuel standard would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 200 million tons in 2020, compared with 2007 levels -- the equivalent of taking about 32 million cars off the road in 2020. The campaign also estimates the annual consumption of gasoline derived from foreign oil imports would drop by about 30 billion gallons in 2020.

Obama also has proposed a bill in the Senate that would raise fuel efficiency standards. If that were enacted and combined with his carbon program, it would cut about 583 million tons of greenhouse gases in 2020, the equivalent of taking about 96 million cars off the road.

A Warming Trend for Putting Wood Waste to Work as Fuel

Climate Concerns Spur New Interest In 'Bio-Oil' Efforts

By Doug Struck, Washington Post Foreign Service
Washington Post Friday, April 20, 2007

GUELPH, Ontario -- A mountain of wood -- broken rafters, studs and floorboards recovered from demolished houses -- rises on a lot here. In a few million years, geologic forces could make it oil. Entrepreneurs are hoping to do it this month.

The pile of debris is growing as welders join the last pieces of machinery to convert wood scraps into "bio-oil" that can replace conventional heating oil. The new fuel is one of a widening variety of long-delayed petroleum alternatives moving closer to commercial production as concern over global warming makes them more attractive.

"There's going to be a mix of fuels in the future," said Andrew Kingston, head of Dynamotive Energy Systems, the company building the plant. "You can think of each one of these plants as an oil well."

President Bush has set an ambitious goal of 35 billion gallons of alternative fuels produced annually by 2017. The most recognized biofuel now is ethanol, a gasoline substitute brewed from corn and other grains, which promoters say will significantly reduce the greenhouse gases pumped into the air from petroleum-based fuel.

But when the energy required to grow corn is counted, the advantage of ethanol is marginal, and using a food source to power cars remains troubling to some. Researchers are looking at other methods to convert cellulose such as grass or weeds or discarded lumber into fuels. Some have focused on using enzymes for that conversion, others on chemical or mechanical treatments.

"I don't think there's going to be a silver bullet," said Gregory Kats, managing director of Capital E, an energy consulting firm in Washington. "I think it's clear there is a lot of opportunity. There is going to be a lot of innovation, and this is a case where letting a thousand flowers bloom is a good idea."

The plant rising in Guelph, 40 miles west of Toronto is being built by one of at least three Canadian companies using variations of pyrolysis, an update of a technique used for years to produce charcoal.

The wood debris is cleaned and ground into sawdust, then injected into a heated, airless chamber with nitrogen. In a flash, the sawdust vaporizes into three forms: oil that is drawn off and sold, gases that are re-burned, and char that can be mixed with the oil or used as a fertilizer.

The process is considered "carbon neutral" because it uses carbon that is in the wood and that through natural decay would one day contribute to carbon dioxide emissions anyway. With petroleum fuel, in contrast, crude oil is brought to the surface to emit atmospheric carbon that would otherwise have remained trapped underground. In addition, the new fuels are low in sulfur, which adds to smog.

"We are not using anything that can be used as a food source. We take residual waste-- forestry debris, scrap wood, construction demolition wood," Kingston said in an interview at the company headquarters in Vancouver. "Residual biomass has little or no value, so the cost structure means you can compete."

While the process works in a laboratory, there are pitfalls to making it successful on a scale large enough to be commercially profitable, researchers acknowledge. A pilot plant by Dynamotive at West Lorne, Ontario was heavily subsidized by government agencies, recorded large losses and never did achieve large-scale bio-oil production, a worrisome precursor to the plant being built in Guelph.

There were "mechanical and design difficulties," Kingston said, "but we are confident we have resolved them."

"Bio-oil has its place" in the effort to use plant sources for fuel, said Michio Ikura, senior research scientist at the Canmet Energy Technology Center, a Canadian government institution that helps develop technologies. "But the economics differ from site to site. The companies don't want to talk about the economics much."

Proponents of the pyrolysis process are optimistic that profits can be found. Ensyn Technologies, a company with Canadian and U.S. divisions, has been using the process since 1989 at a plant in Wisconsin to produce Liquid Smoke, a meat-flavoring chemical contained in the oil. The rest of the bio-oil produced is reused in the plant for heating.

Ensyn is building another plant near Ottawa to skim off other chemicals from the bio-oil. David Boulard, executive vice president of Ensyn, contends that using it for both heating and to produce other salable chemicals is a winning combination.

"The pyrolysis produces a soup of chemicals," Boulard said from Ottawa. But the "fuel will always be a key, either primary or secondary," to profitability.

Dynamotive's plan is to make relatively small, modular pyrolysis plants located near the source of fuel supplies -- its West Lorne plant is next to a flooring manufacturer that generates scrap wood, and the Guelph plant will be operated by a recycling company that handles demolition waste.

This will cut the costs of hauling wood supplies to the plant, a key factor in whether the process will be profitable.

Peter Fransham, a researcher who has been working on pyrolysis for 19 years, heads an Ottawa-based company trying to make a mobile pyrolysis plant. Machines developed by his Advanced BioRefinery Inc. will be transportable on trucks from one supply of wood waste, such as the discarded "slash" from a lumbering operation, to another.

Fransham said previous attempts to produce oil from plant waste-- Germany did it during World War II and South Africa did it under economic sanctions-- have always stumbled over profitability.

"In the past, when we had short rises in oil prices-- the 1970s and '80s-- we all jumped into the renewable energy business, and then it cratered" when oil prices dropped, he said. "What is new, now, is the concern for climate change. That has given us a second driver that we never had before.

"As an industry, we haven't really delivered very well what we touted that we can do," Fransham acknowledged. "We are about the same state the oil industry was in the 1900s. Once we get into the point where we can start production and demonstrate large-scale production of bio-oil, then you will see it move to the next tier."

Poll: One-third believe climate change a threat

Washington Post
in the tri-Valley Herald, Friday, April 20, 2007

WASHINGTON - A third of Americans say global warming ranks as the world's single largest environmental problem, double the number who gave it top ranking last year, a nationwide poll shows.

In the new poll, conducted jointly by The Washington Post, ABC News and Stanford University, most of those surveyed said that climate change is real and that they want the federal government to do more about it. But the survey also shows how little public agreement there is about the policies the United States should adopt to address it.

The findings come weeks after the Supreme Court ruled the federal government has the right to regulate carbon dioxide, the largest contributor to human-caused warming. Congress is pressing to enact limits on all greenhouse-gas emissions linked to climate change, but it remains unclear how soon either the House or Senate could pass such legislation.

According to the poll, seven in 10 Americans want more federal action on global warming, and about half of those surveyed think the government should do "much more" than it is doing now.

By a 40-point margin, the public trusts congressional Democrats more than it trusts President Bush to handle global warming. More than nine in 10 Democrats in the poll said they trusted their party's leaders over Bush on the issue, as did 54 percent of independents and one in five Republicans.

Bush has consistently maintained he would rely on scientific developments and voluntary measures, rather than curbs on greenhouse-gas emissions, to tackle global warming.

Although many respondents say global warming is an issue that matters to them - 52 percent say the issue is "extremely" or "very" important personally, double the percentage that said so a decade ago - many base their views more on personal experience than on scientific findings.

Tom Sheppard, who lives in Dalton, Pa., described himself as "a typical Republican banker who doesn't have a lot of faith in the administration where this issue is concerned." He said he became concerned about climate change after seeing retreating glaciers in Alaska last year and reading about melting of the Greenland ice sheet.

However, there was no consensus among respondents about how - or whether - the government should regulate corporations or change the tax code to cut down on emissions.

One in five favors higher taxes on electricity to encourage conservation, and about a third support higher gasoline taxes. Sixty-two percent of those surveyed say the government should require power plants to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. Forty-two percent think the government should require greater fuel efficiency for vehicles, something both the administration and Congress back, and 36 percent want to require manufacturers to produce more efficient air conditioners, refrigerators and other appliances.

Eighty-four percent think that average global temperatures have been rising over the last century, and more than half say weather patterns have become more unstable where they live. Still, only four in 10 are "extremely" or "very" sure global warming is happening, and 56 percent continue to think there is "a lot" of disagreement among scientists about climate change.

This last finding may stem from Americans' skeptical attitudes toward scientists: A third of respondents trust what scientists say about the environment either "completely" or "a lot," and a quarter say they trust such statements either "a little" or "not at all."

Public doubt that there is a scientific consensus on global warming has dipped since last year but still contrasts with the growing evidence that climate change is real and is caused by human activity.

Charlotte Stewart, who works for a title company and lives in Terre Haute, Ind., said she believes researchers are divided because when she looks around online, "you see one person saying it's a problem, you see another person saying it's not a problem." But Stewart added that unstable weather in her own area has convinced her climate change is happening.

"I'm 51 years old. I don't see myself as old, but just in the short time I've been around I can see it as a problem," she said.

(Begin Optional Trim)

The latest international assessment of climate change by more than 1,200 scientists, published two weeks ago by the U.N.-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, concluded with "high confidence" that human-generated emissions are already triggering observable changes in ecosystems on land and sea.

Americans are also split on what causes global warming in the first place: 41 percent say the temperature rise stems mainly from human activities - a 10-percentage-point increase from last year - while 42 percent attribute it about equally to human and natural causes.

After global warming, respondents were most likely to raise air pollution as the "single biggest" environmental problem - cited by 13 percent. No other concern was cited by more than six percent in the open-ended question.

Nearly nine in 10 said warming will be a serious problem in the future if nothing is done to curb it, but nearly two-thirds thought that a "great deal" or a "good amount" can be done to reduce global warming's effects.

And people are not relying only on the government: Most say they would be willing to personally change some of the things they do in order to mitigate climate change, even if it involves some degree of sacrifice. Nearly three-quarters said they have already made an effort to reduce energy consumption at home; seven in 10 said they already use at least one compact fluorescent light bulb, a type of bulb that uses very little electricity.

EPA recognizes greenest groups

By Douglas Fischer, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, April 20, 2007

Nearly three dozen individuals and organizations throughout the Pacific Southwest were lauded Monday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for their efforts to protect and preserve the environment.

Among them were 14 Northern Californians, including an Oakland-based nail salon collaborative, a University of California purchasing manager, an East Palo Alto school nurse and a University of California, Davis researcher studying how gas and manure from dairy cows contribute to state's smog.

"These organizations and individuals have applied creativity, teamwork and leadership in addressing many of the West's most sensitive and complex environmental challenges," said Wayne Nastri, the region's top EPA official, in a statement.

"The winners set an example for all of us to follow."

One of them also probably deserves our thanks: San Francisco's Bay Area Recycling Outreach Coalition, which has motivated more than 500,000 residents to take action to stop junk mail. The group pooled funds to buy radio spots heard by some 8 million people, according to the EPA.

The ads encouraged Bay Area residents to download the stop junk mail kit from the coalition's Web site, <<http://www.stopjunkmail.org>>. In 2006, 672,000 residents did so.

Other winners include:

-Laurie Bauer, a registered nurse for the Ravenswood City School District in East Palo Alto, for her efforts to improve the health of all the districts' students, particularly those with asthma.

-Frank Mitloehner of UC Davis, who established that manure and gas emissions from the Central Valley's 1 million dairy cows is the biggest contributor to the region's smog problem.

-The Port of Oakland's Clean Vehicle Partnership, led by the port, Pacific Gas & Electric, Clean Air Transport and Quality Terminal Services. The effort replaced 11 older diesel trucks with cleaner-burning natural gas vehicles, saving 5,000 gallons of diesel fuel and reducing emissions plaguing West Oakland.

-The California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, a group of public health advocates, nail salon workers and owners, and community groups that promotes the health of salon workers statewide. The group was instrumental in the 2005 passage of California's Safe Cosmetic Act, which requires manufacturers to disclose toxic ingredients in their products.

-Lesley Clark, the University of California's commodity manager, for her efforts to integrate "environmentally preferable purchasing standards" into the university's contracts, affecting from \$1.3 billion to \$2 billion in university purchases over the next five years.

For a complete list of winners, visit the EPA's Web site at <<http://www.epa.gov/region09/awards>>.

[Opinion in the OC Register, Thursday, April 19, 2007:](#)

California Focus: What we can do for the environment Individual, small changes can add up to a big improvement

By BARBARA LA RAIA

A writer in the San Francisco Bay Area

In the 13th and 14th centuries, air pollution in England was so bad that coal burning for home heating was punishable by torture or the threat of death. Until about 1800 the principal fuel was wood. But since the Industrial Revolution, fossil fuels - coal, petroleum and natural gas - have been our major power source. And much of U.S. energy needs are met by burning coal, the biggest producer of carbon dioxide emissions, the No. 1 greenhouse gas. Particulates, 30 times smaller than the width of a human hair, are a byproduct of coal burning and are linked to lung disease and premature death.

So, with this year's Earth Day set for this Sunday, this is a proper moment to consider how we can preserve a healthy environment while meeting our energy needs. First, there needs to be a balance between the philosophies of far-left environmentalists touting excessive regulation and those who minimize environmental problems despite credible findings that they exist.

There should be only the most necessary, unambiguous government regulations to assure that the solution is not worse than the problem, as happened with the gasoline additive MTBE. The chemical was mandated as a way to clean the air, but ended up adding toxic aldehydes to the air and also poisoning some communities' water supplies as it leaked from underground gasoline storage tanks.

Excessive regulation and overzealous enforcement also can lead to business or utility closures, as happened to a water company in New River, Ariz., which shut down because the cost of upgrading its equipment was too high. That forced the company's former customers to drill their own wells, which, at least, were not subject to EPA regulations.

Also, what can we do to reduce energy consumption and [clean the air](#)? We may want to look at Japan, the world's second-largest economy and most energy-efficient developed nation. Three-fourths of Japanese view energy conservation as a personal responsibility. This as opposed to Americans, some of whom told a Gallup Poll that the environment was a relatively low concern. Japan has virtually no natural resources, yet its energy consumption per person is almost half that of the U.S., and it accounts for 48 percent of the planet's solar power generation, compared with America's 15 percent.

The 18th century British statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke said: "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little." Americans need to realize that our greatest energy resource is energy conservation. Having a mindset of repair, reuse and conserve would reduce energy use substantially and contribute to environmental health. Here are some examples:

- Repairing shoes and clothes saves on energy used to produce new ones.
- Every degree the home heater thermostat is reduced saves 3 percent to 5 percent on energy use.
- About 90 percent of the energy used for washing clothes goes to heating the water, so substitute warm water. Hang clothes outside to dry on sunny days. And periodically service your water heater, which accounts for 20 percent of all energy used in the home.
- Underinflated tires can waste up to 5 percent of a tank of gasoline. A well-tuned vehicle uses up to 9 percent less gasoline.
- Avoid using air conditioning if possible. (A/C is almost nonexistent in France.) The California Energy Commission says replacing a dark-colored roof with a white roof often can save as much electricity as new solar panels would generate.
- Avoid toxic dumping and runoff. Bruce Whitaker, executive assistant to Orange County Supervisor Chris Norby, says he composts a lot and doesn't use pesticides in his home's garden. The city of Orange picks up used motor oil at residents' homes.
- Dabbing caulk around drafty windows can reduce heating costs, and using skylights for natural lighting can trim your electricity bill.

Small lifestyle changes can contribute a great deal to a cleaner environment. Just as a democracy will collapse without citizen participation, our environment will suffer unless each of us takes small steps which will lead to a giant leap for a healthier environment.

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Friday, April 20, 2007](#)

Anita Creamer: Green lifestyle runs risk of fading

By Anita Creamer - Bee Columnist

As lots of contributors to Earth-conscious Internet sites like to put it, green is the new black.

But it remains to be seen whether green-- shorthand, as even the least crunchy- granola among us know, for environmental friendliness -- will prove as enduring as the color black is in couture, or whether a world afflicted with a dangerously short attention span will instead surrender to green fatigue.

For now, green's going strong.

The governor has appeared on the covers of Outside and Newsweek, promoting his green agenda, while Hollywood environmentalist Leonardo DiCaprio is the cover boy for Vanity Fair's annual green issue. Fortune has a green issue, too. So does Elle.

Elle, people. A fashion magazine.

Not that Elle's young target demographic shouldn't have its eyes opened to what the magazine is calling "eco-chic," but sheesh. Way to hop on the bandwagon.

So far, it's been a green year. "An Inconvenient Truth," which woke up a lot of people to the urgent threat of global warming, won an Oscar. Awareness is rising. Hybrid vehicle sales are increasing.

Earlier this year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change-- reflecting the scientific knowledge of 1,250 researchers in 30 countries -- released a report calling global warming "unequivocal," contradicting the Bush administration's long efforts to deny such claims.

And the Supreme Court recently ruled that greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide are pollutants subject to Clean Air Act provisions, rejecting the administration's longtime claim to the contrary and opening the door for federal Environmental Protection Agency action.

Clearly, environmental issues are serious business requiring serious attention: Green should not simply be the new black but also "the new red, white and blue," in the words of New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman.

Unfortunately, green has also become the pop culture fad of the hour.

The backlash should begin shortly, because green has turned into a trendy way to market products ranging from bamboo flooring to biodegradable coat hangers and eco-certified bridal bouquets.

I'm not exaggerating. These are among the avalanche of green products I've received publicity materials for lately.

America's advertisers see an opening, a way to make a little more green while cluttering the nation with press releases printed on recycled paper.

But isn't the green lifestyle about using and reusing what you've got rather than rushing out to buy more, more, more? Yes, even when the more in question is made from locally grown organic cotton.

Consider one measure of environmental awareness: The national recycling rate has only reached 30 percent, according to the EPA. In the city of Sacramento, we take our big, blue household recycling bins for granted, but in the rest of the country, separately disposing of paper products, plastics and glass is hardly a habit.

California's green-friendly routines are foreign to most of America, which remains solidly out of touch with the joy of composting and the beauty of solar panels.

A nation still choking on exhaust and an excess of material goods can hardly afford the trivialization of green inherent in promoting products such as robotic, low-emission lawn mowers.

Besides, there's a fine line between harnessing the star power of the likes of Leo to sell the environmental movement, and having stars' self-righteous trend-hopping turn off much of mainstream America.

But here we are. And here we've been before, as the energy of Earth Day 1970 gradually faded into overload and ennui -- and, finally, into the virulent sort of anti-environmentalism that allowed the Bush administration to come up with the deceptively named "Clear Skies" initiative, which permitted more industrial air pollution.

If green's just another fad, it's just another empty promise.

[Washington Post, Letter to the Editor, Friday, April 20, 2007:](#)

The Value of Lost Trees

A significant factor not mentioned in "Increased Greenhouse Emissions Decried" [Metro, April 13] is that most of the hardwood forests here have been killed to make way for pavement and buildings.

Millions of large trees that once absorbed carbon dioxide, provided shade and prevented damaging runoff into the Chesapeake Bay are now gone.

To reverse this trend we ought to preserve what little forest remains, plant more trees and require roof gardens on commercial buildings.

*Rosemary Lockett
Manassas*