

LA sewage still on its way to Kings County

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, May 5, 2009

Composted Los Angeles sewage is still coming to western Kings County. It's just taking longer than expected. You can expect a giant plant southeast of Kettleman City to start churning out 100,000 tons a year of the treated muck in 2011, with an estimated full capacity of 300,000 tons per year reached by 2013.

Construction of an administration building is under way, with plans for the adjacent plant still being finalized.

Early projections called for the plant to be operating by now, with the treated product going on surrounding farmland as fertilizer for fiber and animal feed crops.

But the Combined Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, a conglomeration of the sewage treatment departments in 78 Southland cities, ran into permitting delays and logistical obstacles that have delayed the process.

One thing that isn't delaying the process: Legal hurdles.

The project was cleared despite early opposition, first from some Kings County residents protesting at county Board of Supervisors' meetings, later from two lawsuits settled by April 2006.

The concern was that unknown health threats lurk in the muck, which is treated to kill pathogens but still contains trace industrial chemicals, pharmaceuticals, heavy metals and pesticides.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has deemed the final product safe for application to fiber crops like cotton and feed crops that aren't for direct human consumption.

Once operational, the plant will take treated sewage from Los Angeles, mix it with green waste from mostly agricultural sources and run it through a composting process.

It will be spread on 12,000 acres of cropland leased to Westlake Farms, a Westside farming operation.

Ceil Howe Jr., president of Westlake Farms, said he's eager to get it started.

Westlake has always dealt with marginal soils on the dry, salty western side of Kings County. More recently, the farm has struggled with lack of water because of the prolonged drought and pumping restrictions in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

Howe called the composted sewage a "great soil amendment" that will save the company money on expensive nitrogen fertilizers.

The company plans to grow wheat and alfalfa hay on the treated land, Howe said.

Howe said he expects yields to increase.

Area farmers were anxious for the plant to start up so they could start sending their green waste there. In most cases, [air pollution restrictions](#) no longer allow them to burn it.

The plant still has to get a permit from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, said Mike Sullivan, division engineer for the combined sanitation districts.

Sullivan expects the districts to get that permit later this year.

Ford invests \$550M to bring new Focus to market

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, May 6, 2009

WAYNE, Mich. -- Ford Motor Co. will invest \$550 million to convert its old Michigan Truck Plant into a facility that will build small compact modern cars, the car maker said Wednesday.

The retooled facility, which once built sport utility vehicles like the Lincoln Navigator, will now build Ford's next-generation Focus, expected to roll off the line next year.

The plant will also build a new battery-electric version of the Focus for the North American market. That vehicle is expected to debut in 2011.

The struggling automaker says roughly 3,200 jobs will be created in Michigan because of the plant conversion.

The majority of Ford's investment will be spent on manufacturing at the site and the remainder on engineering and launch costs.

Ford says it will also consolidate operations at its Wayne Assembly plant and transform two other truck and SUV plants -- the Cuautitlan Assembly in Mexico and the Louisville Assembly in Kentucky -- as part of the retooling.

"We're changing from a company focused mainly on trucks and SUVs to a company with a balanced product lineup that includes even more high-quality, fuel-efficient small cars, hybrids and all-electric vehicles," said Mark Fields, Ford's president of The Americas, in a statement.

The Dearborn, Mich.-based automaker will also build the same Focus it is offering its North American customers in Europe and Asia.

In addition to Ford's [zero-emission](#) Focus battery-electric car, the company is working on several other product plans. The company is working with Smith Electric to sell a battery electric commercial vehicle for North America in 2010. It also plans to introduce in 2012 a next-generation hybrid vehicle and a plug-in hybrid vehicle.

Michigan, Wayne county, and the city of Wayne have contributed more than \$160 million in tax credits and grants to support Ford's expansion.

Ford shares rose 12 cents, or 2 percent, to \$5.97 in morning trading.

Group says coal plant pollution fouls Grand Canyon

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, May 6, 2009

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — A group of conservationists says pollution from a coal-fired power plant is clouding views of the Grand Canyon, and they want the federal government to do something about it.

A petition filed by the conservationists Tuesday asks the National Park Service to declare that particulate matter and nitrogen oxide emissions from the Navajo Generating Station in Page are harming air quality.

The group says the declaration could trigger calls for a reduction in emissions at the plant.

The plant on the Navajo Nation is operated by the Salt River Project, which supplies water and power to the Phoenix area. The agency says it has submitted a plan to cut nitrogen oxide emissions by 40 percent, although no cuts in particulate matter are planned.

PNM settles pollution violations for \$6.9 million

By Sue Major Holmes, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, May 6, 2009

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—Public Service Company of New Mexico has paid the state of New Mexico \$6.9 million to settle air quality violations that occurred earlier in the decade at the San Juan Generating Station in northwestern New Mexico.

The money, which will go into the state general fund, represents the largest payment in the history of the state Environment Department, that agency said Tuesday.

The same day, PNM announced the completion of a three-year, \$330 million environmental upgrade at the coal-fired plant at Waterflow. The utility said the improvements are the most significant upgrades in the plant's history and will reduce emissions by about 14,000 tons annually.

Environmental groups sued the Albuquerque-based utility in 2002, contending PNM routinely exceeded federal pollution limits at the plant 15 miles northwest of Farmington in the Four Corners region.

The violations that led to the settlement occurred between 2005 and 2008 after PNM, the state, the Grand Canyon Trust and the Sierra Club entered into a federal consent decree for previous air quality violations at the plant between 2001 and 2004, the Environment Department said.

The consent decree settled thousands of violations of PNM's air quality permit limits for nitrous oxides, sulfur dioxide and opacity at the 1,798-megawatt plant and required the utility to make improvements.

Information gathered from the first three of the plant's four units to be upgraded shows an estimated 80 percent drop in mercury emissions, 20 percent decrease in sulfur dioxide emissions, 30 percent drop in nitrogen oxide emissions and a "significant reduction" in particulate matter, PNM said.

Upgrades included installation of technology to control mercury and particulates and systems to increase removal of sulfur dioxide.

"The completion of the upgrade is good news for air quality in the Four Corners region and good news for PNM customers, who will have continued access to this affordable, reliable source of power for years to come," Pat Vincent-Collawn, PNM president and chief executive officer, said in a news release.

Environment Secretary Ron Curry said he expects the upgraded plant will comply with the state air quality permit, but his agency will continue monitoring to ensure that happens.

Rob Smith, Southwest representative for the Sierra Club in Phoenix, said the completion of the improvements is "a good news health story" for residents in the Farmington area.

"It's one power plant that's cleaner than it was, so people can certainly literally breathe easier," he said.

However, Smith said the Sierra Club was disappointed the settlement payment went to the general fund rather than to alternative energy projects.

"We had hoped that money that was simply a fine to acknowledge past pollution would be directed into something that would create a cleaner energy future," he said.

"Coal is still dirty even if you burn it with these modern controls," Smith said.

Roger Clark, air and energy director for the Grand Canyon Trust in Flagstaff, Ariz., said the upgraded plant was "a positive result for everyone involved," although he said it will take a year to demonstrate the improvements reduce emissions as expected.

"We're glad they completed the construction work as they agreed to," he said. "We believe the air in the region will be better for their investment" and that the health of San Juan Basin residents will be improved by reduced emissions. He also said lower emissions will improve visibility at surrounding national parks such as Mesa Verde in Colorado.

Clark particularly cited the reduction of mercury emissions.

"This is the first time ever that mercury emissions have been reduced from a coal plant," he said. "...In that respect, PNM is ahead of the game."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has been crafting a rule limiting mercury emissions from power plants, the largest source. Mercury can damage developing brains of fetuses and very young children.

Under the settlement, PNM agreed to lower permit levels on emissions and to pay for excess emissions while improvements were being built. PNM said it and the plant's other owners have been putting money in escrow since the settlement was signed and have now made the payment.

PNM, which operates the generating station, owns 47 percent, so that was its share of the payment. Other owners include Tucson Electric Power, Southern California Public Power Authority, Tri-State Generation and Transmission and other entities in California, New Mexico and Utah, according to PNM's Web site.

The subsidiary of the Albuquerque-based energy holding company PNM Resources provides electricity to 495,000 retail customers in New Mexico. Last summer, the San Juan plant provided 58 percent of PNM's electricity.

A PNM spokesman, Don Brown, said the improvements will mean a modest increase to the plant's operating costs.

Highlights from the Texas Legislature

Pollution Commotion

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, May 6, 2009

A small group of Senate Democrats tried but failed to derail Gov. Rick Perry's appointment of Texas A&M professor Brian Shaw to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Perry appointed Shaw, whose research speciality is air pollution, in November 2007, meaning this legislative session was the first time his nomination would be considered by the Senate.

Led by Sen. Eliot Shapleigh of El Paso, the Democrats criticized Shaw over several recent permits awarded over staff objections and other issues.

"TCEQ today in Texas is a lapdog for polluters," Shapleigh said.

The remarks drew a sharp rebuke from Sen. Steve Ogden, R-Bryan, who said the opposition to Shaw amounted to "character assassination."

"They don't like the way he's voted on a couple of cases. People wonder why good people aren't willing to serve their government," Ogden said.

Shaw was confirmed on a 22-7 vote.

White House pushes ethanol

By H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, SF Chronicle, Washington Post and other papers, Wednesday, May 6, 2009

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration renewed its commitment Tuesday to speed up investments in ethanol and other biofuels while seeking to deflect some environmentalists' claims that huge increases in corn ethanol use will hinder the fight against global warming.

President Barack Obama directed more loan guarantees and economic stimulus money for biofuels research and told the Agriculture Department to find ways to preserve biofuel industry jobs. The recession, as well as lower gasoline prices, has caused some ethanol producers to suffer, including some who have filed for bankruptcy.

Obama said an interagency group also would explore ways to get automakers to produce more cars that run on ethanol and to find ways to make available more ethanol fueling stations. "We must invest in a clean energy economy," Obama said in a statement.

The reassurances to the ethanol industry came as the Environmental Protection Agency made public its initial analysis on what impact the massive expansion of future ethanol use could have on climate change. Rejecting industry and agricultural interests' arguments, it said its rules — which will take months to develop — will take into account increased greenhouse gas emissions as more people plant ethanol crops at the expense of forests and other vegetation and land use is influenced worldwide by the demand for biofuels.

When Congress in 2007 required a huge increase in ethanol use — to as much as 36 billion gallons a year by 2022 — it also required that ethanol — whether from corn or cellulosic crops like switchgrass or wood chips — have less of a "lifecycle" impact on global warming than does gasoline. It set the threshold at 20 percent climate-pollution improvement for corn ethanol and 60 percent for cellulosic ethanol, although ethanol made from facilities already operating would be exempt.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said the analysis shows corn ethanol emitting 16 percent less greenhouse gases than gasoline, even taking into account global future land-use changes.

But that's true in only one of the scenarios the EPA examined; another showed corn ethanol would account for 5 percent more greenhouse gases than gasoline. The scenario Jackson cited assumes future

environmental benefits over a period of 100 years will more than pay back the initial increase in greenhouse gases from land-use changes; the second assumes a shorter payback period of 30 years.

Frank O'Donnell, president of the advocacy group Clean Air Watch, said the Obama administration was "walking a tightrope" to try to reconcile the expansion of corn ethanol with its determination to aggressively address climate change. He called the assumption of a 100-year ethanol payback to make up for early greenhouse emission increases "nothing but an accounting trick to make corn ethanol look better."

But environmentalists also praised the EPA for making clear it will take into account worldwide land-use changes in assessing ethanol's climate impacts. "The devil is always in the details, but we're pleased that the EPA proposed rules that would require all global warming pollution from biofuels to be taken into account," said Kate McMahon of Friends of the Earth.

The ethanol industry and farm-state members of Congress had wanted only a comparison of direct emissions, which show ethanol as the clear winner, but welcomed the EPA's promise to examine the issue further.

"There is currently no scientific agreement or certainty to quantify domestically produced ethanol impacts on land-use change," argued Roger Johnson, president of the National Farmers Union, responding to the EPA assessment.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, said he was "skeptical about the science" about the indirect land-use impacts of ethanol on climate change, but that he is pleased the EPA "recognizes the need for a thorough analysis and review of this issue prior to any final decision." Jackson said that as the EPA develops its regulation it will seek out peer-reviewed scientific views on the issue and make its final determination "based on the best science available."

New standards could cut tax breaks for corn-based ethanol

Rules proposed by Obama administration set the stage for a battle between Midwest grain producers and environmentalists who say the gasoline additive actually worsens global warming.

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer

L.A. Times, Wednesday, May 6, 2009

Reporting from Washington -- The Obama administration on Tuesday proposed renewable-fuel standards that could reduce the \$3 billion a year in federal tax breaks given to producers of corn-based ethanol. The move sets the stage for a major battle between Midwest grain producers and environmentalists who say the gasoline additive actually worsens global warming.

For much of the last decade, federal officials have touted the potential of corn ethanol as a substitute for gasoline and a tool for reducing global warming and foreign oil dependence.

However, environmentalists and others have questioned the wisdom of that support.

A recent Congressional Budget Office study found that increased ethanol production was responsible for 10% to 15% of last year's increased U.S. food costs. And the rush to produce more corn for fuel has had a global environmental impact as forests and other vegetation have been cleared to make way for cropland.

The Environmental Protection Agency's climate-change rules are subject to public comment and revision before they become final. And exactly how big their impact will be on corn producers' tax breaks depends how corn ethanol is determined to affect the environment.

The wide range of possibilities was evident in the EPA's analysis of various fuels' contributions to global warming. Corn ethanol could be substantially worse for the climate than traditional gasoline, or it could be substantially better -- depending on how it is produced and on the accounting methods the EPA settles on for tallying its greenhouse gas emissions.

"The rules are kind of in the category of wait-to-see-what-happens," said Rodney Weinzierl, executive director of the Illinois Corn Growers Assn.

However, industry officials were cheered Tuesday by the announcement that nearly \$1 billion in stimulus funds would go toward advanced biofuel research and that the government would take new steps to promote ethanol-powered cars and fueling stations.

Although biofuels as a whole -- including those made from grasses and even algae -- are considered promising alternatives to petroleum, some researchers have begun challenging the use of corn for this purpose.

In particular, they point to the "indirect land-use" effects of pulling corn out of the world food supply, which could force farmers in developing nations to clear rain forests -- and release massive amounts of carbon dioxide in the process -- in order to plant corn.

Congress in 2007 mandated an increase in biofuel production, peaking at 36 billion gallons a year by 2022. It also called for corn ethanol to emit 20% fewer greenhouse gases than gasoline, and ethanol made from crops such as switchgrass or wood chips to release 60% less.

The EPA rules proposed Tuesday include indirect land-use calculations in tallying emission. Many crops grown specifically for biofuels, such as switchgrass, pass the test easily. In many cases, corn and soy-based biodiesel do not.

The move comes on the heels of a California Air Resources Board decision last month to factor indirect land use into the state's renewable fuels standard.

Nathanael Greene, director of renewable energy policy for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said that the administration "looked at the science and decided they were going to do the best analysis they could on land-use impacts. . . . They stuck by it through a lot of political pressure."

Industry groups seized on the EPA's pledge to conduct "peer reviews" of the science underlying indirect land-use analysis, which ethanol interests and many independent scientists say has too high an error margin to be used when calculating a fuel's emissions.

China opens doors to skaters and BMX, hosts the Asia X Games

By Sal Ruibal

USA Today, Wednesday, May 6, 2009

China reached the pinnacle of mainstream sports with the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Now the world's most populous nation has its eyes on action sports.

The SMP Skatepark in Shanghai is the world's largest, with bowls, ramps and rails that cover a space bigger than three football fields and is crowded day and night with skaters and BMX riders.

The Asia X Games just finished a Friday-Sunday run in Shanghai, and the second annual Alli China Invitational is in Beijing this weekend with some of the world's best action sports stars, including American vert skater Andy MacDonald and British BMX rider Jamie Bestwick.

The Invitational will be held in the Beijing University of Technology Gymnasium, the Olympic venue for badminton and rhythmic gymnastics.

Bestwick says his first trip to Beijing in 2008 for a BMX exhibition event was "a real eye-opener. At first, I was taken aback by the poor [air quality](#), but overall I was impressed by their efforts to be seen as a world leader in sports.

"The noise of the crowd was deafening, and they certainly were well-practiced in the use of those (inflatable) tubes they whack together."

MacDonald was part of the first action sports tour to go to Malaysia in 1997.

"Some riders there are starting to get to an international pro level. The interesting thing about the fan base in Asia is that it doesn't know the age limitations that it does in the States," he says. "The crowds in Asia are comprised of not just 'tweens and twenties, but kids and families from Grandma and Grandpa all the way down."

Both athletes have visited the SMP park in Shanghai and spent time with Chinese athletes.

"We rode our bikes from the center of Shanghai to the park, which is pretty far out," Bestwick says. "It was crazy to see these guys on bikes hauling three-quarters of a ton of trash with their bikes. We spent three days riding in the park and didn't make a dent in it. It would probably take two weeks to get through all of it."

MacDonald was impressed with the independent spirit of the locals.

"Every year, I meet more and more Chinese skaters and, yes, they just teach themselves, just like any other skater in the world," he says. "The state here in China has not yet really gotten involved to the point where they'd be trying to train skater-athletes."

MacDonald observes that, while China has made great strides in giving access to action sports, there are other hurdles to overcome before it and other Asian nations become regular stops on the action sports calendar.

"The travel time is not the barrier," he says. "If you live on the West Coast, as I do, it only takes about an hour or two more to get to China than it does to fly to Europe. The barrier is more about it being cost-prohibitive.

"As pro skaters, we all pay our own expenses, and travel to Asia can get pricey. At the same time, the prize purses in Asia have not yet reached the level that they have in the States."

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Wednesday, May 6, 2009:](#)

Fees, regulations and my new summer footwear

By Lois Henry, Californian Columnist

Here are some odds and ends for your entertainment, placed in totally random order so you have to read all the way to the end -- because you never know what gems are hidden here.

Our fees are slipping. Well, here's hoping.

I did a column in March about the Sequoia National Forest Service's inability to account for how it's been spending fees it charges the public for alleged maintenance and upkeep on camping areas around Isabella Lake.

The double-talk was bad enough, but it really turned my stomach after residents sent me photos showing disgusting, broken porta-toilets and overflowing garbage that were supposed to be cleaned up by the Forest Service.

My conclusion was the Forest Service has done a terrible job not only caring for the sites, but communicating with the public about how they're spending our money.

Well, Sen. Max Baucus, D-Montana, apparently doesn't like the situation any better than I do and has introduced S868 to repeal the law under which the fees have been charged.

I called Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, to see what he thought of the bill. There is no house version, so he called the Western Caucus to see if they're going to create one and, if so, asked how he can help.

McCarthy represents the Kern River Valley area where residents have fretted over the fees and lack of service for some time.

"I think this will open the debate so we can discuss whether it's reasonable for the Forest Service to have these fees," McCarthy told me. "If so, we can talk about that, but there absolutely has to be better accountability."

Watch these!

I've been writing about how the California Air Resources Board irresponsibly, I believe, adopted new diesel rules that will all but kill independent trucking and the heavy construction industry in this state.

The rules are based on flawed science cobbled together in a report authored by a man who lied about his credentials. I've been advocating the whole mess should get a do over.

Alas, no one listens to me.

But a couple of bills have been written that at least try to inject some fairness into the regulatory process.

- SB 356, by State Sen. Rod Wright, D-Los Angeles, would require agencies to determine the impact of new regulations on small businesses before they're adopted.

This one made it through the Business, Professions and Economic Development Committee -- where our own State Sen. Dean Florez was one of only two votes against it -- and is now scheduled for a hearing in Appropriations on May 11.

I thought it was a sound, straightforward bill.

But Florez told me he voted against it because we already have rules that require agencies to get public input and analyze the impact of new regulations.

And he also felt it could lead to endless litigation over regulations already established.

"Under the bill, if a small business (the number of which would multiply under the new definition in this bill) sought an exemption to one of these important protections, the responsible agency would not only have to consider it -- the onus would be on them to justify NOT granting the exemption."

Despite Florez's concerns, I think it actually might have a snowball's chance in the Legislature.

The other two bills were introduced by Assembly Democrats, Tony Mendoza, Buena Park and Majority Leader Alberto Torrico, San Jose.

- AB 1085 and AB 1395, respectively, would require the Air Resources Board to show and tell, so to speak, by making public the methodologies and other input supporting regulations, as well as all changes to draft regulations.

Both have yet to be heard.

Gay is good (well, for now anyway)

A few weeks ago I went to a fundraiser for a new group called "Gay is good." (The local gay community wants to raise money to put up billboards and find other ways of communicating that it's not a bad thing to be gay.)

I don't normally go to fundraisers, but I'd heard through Facebook that State Sen. Dean Florez might show up and I really wanted to be there if it happened. It didn't.

For background, I was hammering Florez in mid-April after he signed on as a co-author to a bill that would declare a Harvey Milk Day. Earlier, he was the swing vote to approve a Senate resolution that took issue with the small percentage of signatures needed to get Proposition 8 on the ballot.

Florez had, up until then, spent his entire legislative career voting against gay rights issues.

My working theory is he needs to drum up support for his run for lieutenant governor from the much more politically powerful and left-leaning Bay Area and Los Angeles.

Florez told me that creating a "recognized" day isn't a gay rights issue and there's a recognized day for just about everyone and anyone so no biggie. He did NOT say he'd changed his stance on gay rights nor gay marriage.

That was mid-April.

The very next week another reporter, E.J. Schultz with the Fresno Bee, ran into Florez at the state Democratic convention and "the gay thing" came up.

Here's Florez's quote:

"People change and it's OK to change," he said. "My position right now is the same as [President Obama's] and I think it's a civil rights issue and I don't think that people should in essence stand in the way of people who want to get married."

That reminds me -- it's almost summer and I need buy some new flip flops!

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Google rents 200 goats to graze on their lawn, a solution that they say is more natural and ecological than traditional gas powered lawnmowers. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Google contrata 200 cabras para cortar su césped

La Cronica, Wednesday, May 06, 2009
SILICON VALLEY, EU(Agencias)

El conocido buscador contrató los servicios de 200 cabras para cortar el césped de su sede de Mountain View, Silicon Valley, una solución que, aseguran en Google, es más ecológica y natural que las tradicionales máquinas.

"En lugar de usar ruidosas máquinas que funcionan con gasolina y contaminan, hemos alquilado algunas cabras de la firma California Grazing", explicó Dan Hoffman, responsable de Inmobiliario y de Espacio de Trabajo de Google en el blog de la compañía.

Según publica hoy el portal digital El Mundo de España, a Google le cuesta lo mismo, pero las cabras son mucho más agradables a la vista que los cortacéspedes.

Según publica la prensa norteamericana, la Asociación Protectora de Animales de los Estados Unidos (PETA, por su sigla en inglés) manifestó sus dudas sobre las empresas que ofrecen este tipo de servicios.

PETA está especialmente preocupada por las condiciones en las que los animales son transportados a su "lugar de trabajo", si disponen de lugares para resguardarse en caso de mal tiempo y si se les ofrecen cuidados veterinarios.

Google no es la única compañía que utiliza los servicios de cabras para cortar el césped de sus instalaciones. El portal de internet Yahoo usa los servicios de estos animales una o dos veces al año, al igual que el ayuntamiento de San Francisco en algunas partes de la ciudad.