

## **Wildlife survive wildfire 1,400 acres of habitat scorched**

By Scott Smith

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STANISLAUS COUNTY -- Firefighters were close to containing a blaze Tuesday that charred 1,400 acres of protected wildlife habitat along the San Joaquin River in Stanislaus County where migratory birds and endangered rabbits live, a fire official said.

The riparian brush rabbits appear to have survived the fire just fine but may have to worry about dodging predators in coming months in the denuded landscape, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman said.

Steven Hall, division chief for the West Stanislaus County Fire Protection District, said fire crews expected to have the fire completely extinguished Thursday. He said the fire was 90 percent contained Tuesday afternoon.

The fire started around 1 p.m. Monday near the Old Fisherman's Club, a private men's club on Highway 132, Hall said. The rural fire did not destroy any homes, dairies or hay barns that surround the thickly wooded refuge.

Hall said fire investigators have not yet determined what sparked the blaze.

Twelve firefighting agencies, including those in Ripon and Escalon, were called in to help, Hall said. Monday evening the humidity levels rose and firefighters started to gain the upper hand on the flames that jumped the river three times, he said.

"We've been playing leapfrog for the last 24 hours," Hall said.

Few smoke plumes indicating hot spots still were visible Tuesday by motorists on Highway 132, a heavily traveled route between Modesto and Vernalis. A small inaccessible island in the river still could smolder for a week, Hall said.

Eric Hopson, assistant refuge manager for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said he was optimistic most of the endangered rabbits reintroduced to the area would survive the fire. In the past two years Fish and Wildlife released more than 200 endangered riparian brush rabbits along the San Joaquin River.

"Wildlife like the rabbits could outrun the flames," Hopson said.

The 12,000-acre refuge also is home to geese, ducks, great blue herons and great egrets.

White birds with wide wings flew Tuesday in hazy skies above the river. Giant oaks, black willows and cottonwood trees punctuated the charred landscape but appeared untouched by the fire.

A challenge awaiting the rabbits in the coming weeks and months is finding a place to hide from the owls and coyotes that feed on the rabbit, Hopson said. Fish and Wildlife employees put collars on 65 of the rabbits, Hopson said. The collars transmit the location of each rabbit and whether it is living or dead, he said.

Biologists waiting for the flames to die down already have picked up radar signals from six living rabbits and zero dead ones, Hopson said.

"That's good news so far," Hopson said.

Air quality should be good today in San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties despite smoke from the fire and a bigger wildfire in Yosemite Valley, said Anthony Presto, public-education administrator for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The district suspended all agricultural burning Monday in the San Joaquin Valley until further notice because of the fire in Stanislaus County and other fires in the area, Presto said.

The district may say the air quality is good. But the elderly, young children and sensitive people such as those with heart conditions should avoid smoky conditions, he said.

"The general rule is, if you smell smoke, then you're in an area of bad air quality," Presto said.

## State poised to impose idling limit on diesels

By MATT WEISER, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, July 21, 2004

The familiar clatter of idling diesel engines and the stinky exhaust that goes with them may soon come to an end at loading docks and roadsides all over California.

The state Air Resources Board in Sacramento will consider adopting a new rule Thursday to forbid heavy-duty diesel trucks from idling longer than five minutes. Diesel buses would be limited to 10 minutes.

The rule, if passed, is expected to save vehicle owners up to \$113 million annually in fuel and maintenance costs. It would spare the public an estimated 20,000 tons of smog-forming gases annually. An additional 449 tons of exhaust particulates would be eliminated.

About 20 percent of these pollution reductions are expected to benefit the San Joaquin Valley, a vast trucking corridor that also has the nation's dirtiest skies, as measured by the federal government's eight-hour ozone standard.

"This rule is designed to address people who just pull their truck up and go and have lunch and leave the truck running," said Jerry Martin, air board spokesman. "Sometimes people will leave diesels idling for hours."

Officials at a few local trucking companies said there may be times the rule could be inconvenient, but for the most part they already keep idle time to a minimum.

The new rule mirrors one adopted last year governing school buses. It would be imposed in two phases.

The first phase imposes a five-minute idling limit on all general trucking activities. It would take effect about six months after adoption. Diesel buses would be allowed to idle no more than 10 minutes before loading passengers to ensure the bus reaches a comfortable temperature.

The rule would be enforced by the air board's existing truck inspection staff and by the California Highway Patrol. The board also plans an education campaign.

The second phase addresses overnight idling by truckers on layovers. Many truckers idle their engines on layovers to keep their sleeper cabs comfortable. The proposed five-minute limit would not affect layover idling until Jan. 1, 2009. The Air Resources Board expects new technology to create alternatives to idling by then.

For instance, many truck stops are installing electric systems that allow truckers to stay comfortable without idling. Truck manufacturers are adopting separate power units for cab comfort that run on electricity or clean fuels.

"It seems reasonable to me," Glenn Shellcross said of the proposed rule. He is chairman of the Sierra Club's Buena Vista Group, which includes Bakersfield. "With our air quality what it is, we've got to start doing things that are more creative. We have to start doing something affirmatively to clear our air."

Local trucking companies contacted Tuesday said they can live with the rule. Many already require drivers to minimize idling.

"We kind of discourage them from sitting in the truck with it idling, because of the cost of fuel these days," said Roland Wiebe, general manager of H & B Equipment Co. in Bakersfield, a trucking company that serves a lot of oil field clients.

Beneto Inc., a tanker trucking firm that hauls gasoline and other petroleum products, requires its drivers to shut off their engines and lock their trucks whenever they are parked. It's a security measure to protect volatile cargo.

"It doesn't affect us because we don't leave our trucks idling," said Dave Palmer, Bakersfield terminal manager for Beneto. "The only time they're running is when we're going down the road."

Martin acknowledged there was a time when prolonged idling was necessary. Older diesel fuel blends were prone to "gelling" in cold weather, and older engines had a hard time starting under these conditions.

"You still have a lot of truckers out there that were raised in that era -- when leaving your truck on was the thing to do," said Martin.

"This rule is really designed to address that problem."

Wiebe said an idling limit could be troublesome at times, such as when a truck may need to be moved or aligned repeatedly while loading heavy equipment. But he said his company would abide by the proposed limit, if adopted, to protect air quality.

"Quite frankly, we haven't considered that. But it's probably a good idea," he said.

## **Wasco leaders put dairy issue to people**

By GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, July 21, 2004

WASCO -- Wasco City Council members voted dairies onto the city's November ballots Tuesday night.

The ballot measure will hold no legal sway, but will let county supervisors know how city residents feel about a possible influx of dairies, council members said.

Wasco residents will vote on whether they want dairies within 10 miles of city limits. Originally, two council members had proposed an expanded 15-mile buffer zone, but reduced the request.

"It's really not our question to answer," council member Paul Neufeld said of the dairy siting issue. "But we do have the ability to influence."

In the last six months or so, proposals for 10 dairy-related projects northwest of Wasco have popped into county planners' offices. The projects could cluster more than 100,000 cows outside the city of 22,000.

Wasco and nearby Shafter recently passed a smaller three-mile buffer zone that is still set to go to county supervisors, although its relevance appears to be in limbo.

"The night after we approved that map, it became obsolete," council member Larry Pearson told an aide for county supervisor Ray Watson.

The five-member council voted unanimously in favor of the ballot measure after nearly 90 minutes of impassioned public comment for and against dairies.

Wasco resident Carleen Street said most locals "don't understand the vastness of the potential problem."

Pollution impacts could be "very detrimental to our community overall," said Street, who became alarmed after hearing state water and air officials speak at a July 7 meeting led by Sen. Dean Florez, the Shafter Democrat.

Bakersfield resident Bill Descary told the council "buffer zones send a message to the dairies that they aren't welcome and they will be regulated."

Pat Risi, a Wasco resident, also opposed dairies. "Our air quality is horrible right now," she said. "What is this going to do to us? What is it going to cost us in the future?"

Others spoke in favor of dairies.

Stan Voth touted the economic benefits, calling dairies an "important alternative crop" for agriculture.

"This has always been an ag town, and it always will be an ag town," Voth said. "That's where the money comes from."

Steve Gair said dairies have historically come before residential development in places like Chino without taking away from property values.

"Dairies have been going out in front of us for the last 50 years," Gair said. "We might lose a grand opportunity for this town to grow and to be something more than it currently is."

Richard Beyneveld, who grew up in a dairy family, said the silence of the industry has allowed negative myths to flourish.

"The dairy industry is here at the right time, in the right place with the right technology that will benefit your city," Beyneveld said, spurring an "amen" from one audience member.

Resident Mike McCray pushed for objectivity, a stance later echoed in the comments of council members.

"We want to be careful that we don't polarize our community," McCray said. "Find the facts ... don't jeopardize our community by hearsay. Get the facts."

## **California dairies are turning manure to money**

By Juliana Barbasa

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, July 21, 2004

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) -- More than a dozen dairies in California are building contraptions to turn one of their least-valued products -- the gases that rise from decomposing manure -- into one of the state's most sought-after commodities -- energy.

The state's 1.72 million dairy cows, clustered heavily in the Central Valley, have made California the country's top dairy state. Their milk and cream sell for more than \$4 billion a year, and the industry brings jobs and tax revenue to counties with double-digit unemployment.

But according to air officials, the state's cows also contribute about 10 percent of the chemical compounds that combine in the atmosphere to produce ozone, a principal component in the smog that plagues the San Joaquin Valley's air.

By capturing the offending gases of dairy air, farmers are not only reducing the emissions that cloud the valley, but cutting their own electricity costs. The decidedly low-tech technology also has the potential to play a role, albeit a small one, in meeting the state's constant hunger for new power sources.

To produce energy, the farmer has to scrape up the manure, mix it with water, and pour it into a lagoon typically covered by an enormous plastic bag. When the mixture is heated, it produces methane, which is trapped by the bag, piped into a generator, and burned to create electricity.

The experiment comes a time when the agriculture industry is having to abide by air pollution regulations for the first time. By the end of the month, the local air district is expected to issue guidelines for clean-air technology that will be required in new dairies -- and so-called "methane digesters" are part of the solution, officials said.

"This is probably one of the best forms of emission control from dairies," said Dave Warner, who leads the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's permit program.

But what really got farmers interested, they said, was that the machines literally turn manure into money.

Ron Koetsier, who has 1,200 dairy cows on 160 acres near Visalia in Tulare County, qualified for a matching grant from the state, and since 2002 has been saving about \$30,000 a year on energy costs -- about half his annual bill -- because he can now produce most of the energy he needs onsite.

Once his digester is hooked up to the local utility company, Koetsier said he'll be able to bank energy with the company. When he feeds excess energy into the system, his electricity meter will run backward.

Methane digesters won't produce enough energy to make a significant dent in the state's energy demand -- or even come close, experts said.

Manure from one cow can generate up to two kilowatts per day -- enough to brighten two light bulbs, said Warner, and it takes a dozen cows to power an average house.

Even if all of the 65 billion pounds of manure produced in California every year went into a methane digester, the energy generated could only power a medium-sized town like Modesto.

But the other advantages -- allowing farmers to save money, trapping gases and other chemicals that would have turned into harmful pollutants, and reducing the volume of animal waste -- make the machines an alternative supported by environmentalists as well.

"We've been advocating for years the use of anaerobic digesters, or other 'cover and capture' technology," said Brent Newell, with the environmental advocacy group Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment. "It's definitely beneficial."

Legislation that in 2001 set aside grant money that farmers could apply for, then match with their own cash, has contributed to the recent growth in the system's popularity. Each one of the 14 participating dairymen got up to \$431,000.

Their gamble is being closely watched by other dairy farmers.

As of July 1, all farms and dairies that emit more than 12.5 tons per year of gases that contribute to smog had to apply for local air quality permits and pay hundreds of dollars in annual fees. For the first time, 1,350 of the largest farms and dairies in the nation's most productive farm counties were asked to account for the air pollution they produce.

As long as cleaning the air is also economically feasible, farmers are ready to enlist in the struggle, they said.

"Yeah, it's going to clean the air," said Larry Castelanelli, a third-generation farmer who milks 1,500 cows near Lodi and pays an annual utilities bill that tops \$100,000. "Yeah, there's a concern there. But this is dollar driven. I'm competitive. I'm trying to survive in the dairy industry."

On the Net:

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District: [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org) <<http://www.valleyair.org>>

To learn about methane digesters: [www.suscon.org/dairies/methanedigesters.asp](http://www.suscon.org/dairies/methanedigesters.asp)  
<<http://www.suscon.org/dairies/methanedigesters.asp>>

## **Fire Spurs Evacuations Near Acton**

Residents of hundreds of houses flee the swift-moving blaze. Firefighters are now battling flames on three fronts in L.A. County.

By Eric Malnic and Hector Becerra, Times Staff Writers, LA Times, July 21, 2004

Several hundred homes were evacuated Tuesday when a wind-driven wildfire broke out near Acton and moved rapidly north and east, the third major wildfire to break out in the mountains of northern Los Angeles County in a week.

"We've got a real fight on our hands," said Los Angeles County Fire Inspector Mike McCormick. "We're attacking it with everything we've got - planes, bulldozers and firefighters - but it's still moving."

The firefighters' nemeses - dry, erratic winds and temperatures peaking close to 100 degrees - have plagued fire-ravaged mountain areas for a week and are expected to continue. While property damage so far has been modest, the fires have forced thousands to flee the flames,

closed freeways and kept firefighters on the lines for a week.

"See all the smoke? My home is right up there," said a nervous Cristal Herron, 42, who had just fled her ridgeline home Tuesday with her 13-year-old daughter, a photo album and a home insurance policy. "My husband said, you guys leave right now. It was women and children first, I guess.. He's still up there. He's a crazy person."

The fire ranged across a series of steep canyons and advanced in the sparsely populated hills south and east of Acton, a small railroad town beside the dry Santa Clara riverbed, about 10 miles southwest of Palmdale. By late Tuesday night, more than 5,000 acres had burned and the fire had reached the edge of Angeles National Forest.

About 800 firefighters, 85 fire engines and, during daylight, 14 helicopters and five planes battled the blaze. There was no containment.

One mobile home and possibly two other structures were destroyed, said California Forestry Department Capt. Jim Dellamonica.

The good news was that the fire was moving toward an area burned in 1980 and 1994.

"This fire looks like it may burn into those fires," Dellamonica said. If that happened, he said, the fire would have less fuel.

Officials didn't know what started the so-called Crown fire, which broke out about 1:20 p.m. in Arrastre Canyon. With winds gusting at 25 mph, the blaze leapfrogged from ridge to ridge.

Most of the mandatory evacuations were in Aliso Canyon on the east side of Acton. Several of those homes were cut off when the bridge on Aliso Canyon Road burned and collapsed.

Some other thoroughfares in the area, including Soledad Canyon Road between Acton and the Angeles Forest Highway over the San Gabriel Mountains, were closed by smoke and flames.

A Red Cross evacuation center was set up in Palmdale.

Firefighters said the flames initially threatened a shelter on the outskirts of Acton housing close to 1,000 animals. The shelter is run by the nonprofit Dedication and Everlasting Love To Animals (DELTA) organization. Firefighters were posted at the shelter, and the fire eventually moved away from it.

The fire knocked out several high-voltage transmission lines near Acton just as the hot weather led Californians to set a peak power-consumption record of 44,360 megawatts, officials said. The loss of the lines during record usage forced Southern California Edison Co. to reduce power to 108,000 customers, who volunteered to shut down air conditioners and agricultural pumps.

Clouds of smoke towered thousands of feet in the air, prompting a health advisory because of poor air quality throughout Los Angeles County.

The county Fire Department and the U.S. Forest Service sent about 800 firefighters to the blaze. Many of them were diverted from two other wildfires that were largely controlled Tuesday night after burning for days in the backcountry of northwest Los Angeles County.

Near Santa Clarita, the Foothill fire was about two-thirds contained Tuesday evening after charring more than 6,000 acres of brush and forcing the evacuation of about 1,600 homes. Most of the residents of Fair Oaks, Placerita Canyon and Sand Canyon were back in their homes by Tuesday night, and firefighters said no houses or business buildings had been lost.

Officials said the Pine fire, near Lake Hughes, should be fully contained by tonight. The blaze burned for a week along the San Andreas Fault, searing about 17,500 acres of brushland and destroying three homes and 21 outbuildings.

In Riverside County, the 3,667-acre Melton fire near Hemet was fully contained Tuesday morning after burning 14 outbuildings, 14 vehicles, four mobile homes and a travel trailer.

The National Weather Service said the hot, dry weather is expected to continue in the fire areas and the inland valleys for at least a week, with high temperatures in the 90s through Thursday, increasing to about 100 over the weekend.

## **States to Sue Over Global Warming**

California and seven others, unhappy with U.S. policies, say the carbon dioxide from five energy producers is a 'public nuisance.'

By Miguel Bustillo, Times Staff Writer, LA Times, July 21, 2004

Dissatisfied with the Bush administration's policies on global warming, attorneys general from California and seven other states plan today to sue five large energy producers who they contend are responsible for nearly 10% of the heat-trapping gases that the United States is releasing into the atmosphere.

In an unusual legal maneuver, the states are seeking to force the electricity providers to curb carbon dioxide emissions by arguing that the releases violate an arcane series of "public nuisance" prohibitions against endangering the health of the commons that the U.S. copied from English common law.

The lawsuit is expected to be filed by Democratic attorneys general from California, New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Iowa, Wisconsin, Rhode Island and Vermont. New York City's corporations counsel, also a Democrat, is expected to join the suit as well. It is aimed at four private companies - Cinergy Corp., Southern Co., Xcel Energy and American Electric Power Co. - as well as one public utility, the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The lawsuit represents a direct challenge to the Bush administration, which to date has adopted a policy of continuing to study global warming rather than taking steps to stop it.

The suit is expected to accuse the power producers - which derive much of their electricity from coal-fired plants - of creating a "potentially devastating" public nuisance that threatens the general public, and will seek to force them to cut their carbon dioxide emissions. If successful, the suit probably would require the power producers to invest tens of millions in new exhaust-control equipment, and even consider closing some older plants.

"Global warming is real. The severe threat it poses to our states is real. And the attorneys general are taking needed action to address that threat," said Tom Dresslar, a spokesman for California Atty. Gen. Bill Lockyer. "We can't afford to wait."

Industry groups dismissed the lawsuit as election year grandstanding and questioned whether it had any legal grounds.

Though the suit may be the first to target global warming as a public nuisance, numerous state officials and environmental groups have used nuisance laws in recent years to address air and water pollution. At Lake Tahoe, for example, the South Tahoe Public Utility District used public nuisance laws to force a settlement requiring oil companies to clean up contamination from the gasoline additive MTBE.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency concluded last year that it did not consider carbon

dioxide a pollutant under the federal Clean Air Act. That interpretation is being challenged in federal court by 11 states and 14 environmental groups.

During his first campaign, President Bush promised to regulate power plant releases of carbon dioxide, but he changed his mind after taking office, saying that such rules would hurt the economy. Bush also withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol, an international pact to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, citing an "incomplete state of scientific knowledge."

The Bush administration's stance on global warming has angered critics around the world, who say there is already evidence that elevated carbon dioxide levels are contributing to rising temperatures, with visible consequences in places such as the icecaps of Greenland and Antarctica.

With the latest lawsuit, expected to be filed today in a Manhattan federal court, some of the states active in the suit against the EPA are hedging their bets. If carbon dioxide emissions do not violate the nation's environmental laws, they argue, states should not be barred by federal preemption rules from filing their own legal actions to target companies releasing the gases.

The attorneys general plan to formally announce the lawsuit this morning in a series of simultaneous news conferences around the country, including one by Lockyer in downtown Los Angeles.

Some environmentalists praised the states' action, saying that without their advocacy, the United States' contributions to global warming might not be addressed.

"The Bush administration has buried its head in the sand on this issue. It has protected these big dirty-power companies from having to take any action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions," said Frank O'Donnell, executive director of the Clean Air Trust, a Washington, D.C.-based air pollution watchdog group. "So, the only way to achieve any progress on this issue is for the states to take the initiative."

Power plants are the most concentrated man-made source of carbon dioxide emissions. According to a document prepared by the attorneys general, the five energy producers operate roughly 200 fossil-fuel power plants in the U.S., emitting a combined 646 million tons of carbon dioxide annually. That represents 24% of the country's carbon dioxide releases from power plants, which in turn make up 40% of the overall emissions of the gas in the United States.

Some of the power providers targeted by the suit said Tuesday that they already had planned to make voluntary reductions of carbon dioxide emissions, an approach supported by the Bush administration.

Paul Adelman, a spokesman for Xcel Energy, said the company already has committed to reducing carbon dioxide by 12 million tons per year by 2009, and was in the middle of tripling its wind power generation.

Xcel also has begun a \$1-billion voluntary plan to reduce power plant emissions, including carbon dioxide, from three coal-fired plants in Minnesota, he said.

"We are in the middle of one of the largest voluntary emissions reductions programs ever right now. We are proud of our environmental record," Adelman said.

"There are no regulations governing carbon dioxide at this time," he added, saying that the company does not believe it has broken any laws. "Every person breathes carbon dioxide every day all over the planet."

Carbon dioxide is one of the natural building blocks of life.

But there is a growing consensus among scientists that releases of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases since the Industrial Revolution, primarily from burning coal and oil, are causing an abnormal rise in global temperatures. That position has been supported in recent years by the National Academy of Sciences, the American Meteorological Society and numerous other scientific organizations.

## **Gridlock vs. sales tax**

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Tuesday, July 20, 2004](#)

Actress Sally Field uttered this memorable phrase at an Academy Awards ceremony when she won an Oscar for best actress: "You really like me."

Well, folks, people apparently really like Bakersfield. The proof is in the population boom the city is experiencing. Lots of people from around the state are moving here for a variety of reasons -- among them is the fact that rising housing costs are still less than in other areas.

We always wanted acceptance and gritted our teeth over those long-ago denigrating Johnny Carson jokes about Bakersfield.

But as the cliché warns: Be careful what you wish for -- it might come true.

The 2030 Regional Transportation Plan prepared by the Kern Council of Governments emphasizes that increased growth means there's myriad potential traffic problems in the Bakersfield metropolitan area.

And alleviating the problems could hit us in the pocketbook.

KernCOG, the county's regional transportation planning agency, warns that residents of metro Bakersfield can expect to waste an additional 90,000 hours sitting in traffic by 2030. That is a 364 percent increase over present traffic jams.

Ron Brummett, KernCOG executive director, told *The Californian*: "Basically, what the plan is telling us is that congestion will increase in a lot of different areas."

The county's population is expected to grow 60 percent by 2030, to more than 1.1 million people. About 70 percent of that growth will occur in metro Bakersfield, which is expected to reach 740,000 people.

We won't have to wait until 2030 to realize a worsening traffic problem. Craig Pope, director of Kern County's Roads Department, said the public does not grasp the significance of the problem.

"It's hard for them to grasp until they live it," he said. "We're scrambling always for new funding sources. We're saying, 'You know what? In five years we're really going to be in a bind and not have any way out.'"

The KernCOG report notes that \$2.8 billion in road upgrades and public transit can be funded from available and expected sources. But an additional \$1.3 billion will be needed.

The Regional Transportation Plan says the Golden Empire Transit bus system will need about 200 buses to serve the city by 2030. It now has 79 buses no money for expansion.

Kern is the largest county in California without a designated tax for transportation.

The KernCOG report states that the county could generate \$900 million over 20 years with a slight increase in the sales tax, which would have to be approved by voters.

A citizens' group is studying the feasibility of putting such a proposal on the ballot.

The study will be the first step in finding solutions to prevent gridlock in the future. After it is presented, residents must give it serious consideration in determining if a slight sales tax increase is worth it if it means easing traffic woes.

## **Farming getting less dusty**

[Wednesday, July 21, Modesto Bee, letter to the editor](#)

Your editorial ("Farming efficiency should not trump safety," July 9) appropriately notes that farmers have a right to farm in the most efficient way while observing their responsibility as stewards of the environment.

Your readers should know that farmers have taken a number of steps to reduce the dust associated with almond harvesting and other farming practices:

Almond farmers and organizations that represent them have worked with equipment manufacturers to develop harvesting machines that reduce the dust generated during harvest.

Hundreds of miles of unpaved farm roads have been watered or oiled.

Farmers of many crops have implemented low-till or no-till practices for crops that were disked or cultivated.

Satellite-guided tractors have improved efficiency and reduced the number of trips a tractor must make through a field, reducing dust.

Farmers and ranchers intend to continue working on techniques to improve the valley's air quality. We appreciate your support in assuring that new regulations encourage voluntary stewardship rather than impose costly, "one-size-fits-all" mandates.

BILL PAULI

President, California Farm Bureau Federation  
Sacramento

## **Park This Carpool Plan**

[LA Times, EDITORIAL, July 21, 2004](#)

Pretty much everybody loves hybrid cars, and for good reason. They're slick-looking, and so far the technology appears reliable. They have lower emissions and higher miles per gallon. In fact, they're so beloved that it's almost necessary to offer a disclaimer before stating a key policy point: They don't belong in the carpool lanes with only a driver aboard, as a feel-good bill in the Legislature would allow.

The state created carpool lanes to ease the flow of traffic by encouraging more people to travel in fewer cars. If the lanes were meant to encourage better citizenship through better gasoline mileage, lumbering Suburbans would have been banned from them long ago. Besides, the public hardly needs incentives right now to buy the hybrids. Goaded by high prices at the pump, Californians already queue up on months-long waiting lists to buy the gasoline-electric vehicles.

In a peculiar bit of circular reasoning, AB 2628 would limit the number of carpool-eligible hybrids to a total of 75,000 by 2008. That's the number of Prius, Insight and Civic hybrids that the state forecasts would be sold in California by then without the carpool program. (Only those three models qualify, based on emissions and gas mileage. The state would impose the limit by issuing decals.) If that many hybrids would sell without the incentive, what's the point of offering it?

If the state really wanted to save gasoline, it would keep hybrids in the regular lanes. In a quirk of the breed, they generally get better mileage in the 25- to 45-mph swing of clogged roads than in free flow.

Many carpool lanes are at or near capacity during peak hours. The bill's backers concede the problem; that's another reason the number of eligible cars is, and must remain, limited. But that also means it cannot be used to keep demand for hybrids strong.

There's more reason to like the proposal by Los Angeles Mayor James K. Hahn to grant hybrids free parking. The city would give up nominal meter revenue in exchange for less air pollution, a

good trade. It might prove impracticable, though, since about 30 conventional models also are rated as having ultra-low emissions, with more to come. Who's going to keep track of all these cars?

Still, the Hahn plan has more merit than the state bill, which goes to the Senate Appropriations Committee on Aug. 2. The carpool incentive would sunset in 2008. That gives a car buyer in 2007 little reason to pick one of the three eligible cars. And the awkward reasoning behind this bill gives us no reason to support it.