

Southern Kern struck with smoky air from fire

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Sept. 9, 2006

Smoke from a fire in Ventura County could pose a health risk to residents in southern Kern, valley air regulators say.

Winds are carrying smoke toward Frazier Park, Lake of the Woods, Lebec and the Grapevine, according to meteorologists with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Tiny particles aggravate asthma and other lung conditions, and epidemiologists have linked particulates to heart disease. The district recommends residents avoid exercising in smoky air.

The smoke was present Friday morning as Joan Balcome approached Frazier Mountain High School to drop off her two children. Seeing the smoke, she turned around and went home.

One child has asthma and another was recovering from the flu, said their father, Kirk Tingblad. Neither felt up to braving the smoke, he said.

"Why drop him off when we're going to have to come pick him up again?" Tingblad said of his child with asthma. "I don't know if there's any big danger to it or anything, I just know the smoke aggravates asthma in my son."

SoCal air regulators back policy revising air pollution credits

The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 10, 2006

Regional air regulators backed a measure letting builders of major new power plants buy air pollution credits originally designated for hospitals, schools and other services.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District approved the proposal Friday.

Supporters say the measure will help increase electricity supplies and cut usage of dirtier diesel backup generators.

But critics worry the measure will open urban areas to a wave of construction of large new power plants.

"We've got diesel trucks, refineries and now you're adding these power plants," Mayra Gonzalez, 16, of Southgate said. "I don't see how you can compare working lights to working lungs. I just don't."

Among the first to benefit from the revision could be six plants in Industry, Carson, Vernon, Palmdale, Romoland and Victorville.

The board refused community requests to deny the proposal or delay action on it. Either option could stall or end construction of plants in Victorville and other areas that want them, the board concluded.

However, the board ordered staff to return in January with proposals that could set much higher prices for offsets if plants are planned in areas with existing high amounts of air pollution.

Bad air days: making the call

Breathe easier knowing this forecaster's on top of Valley air quality.

By Don Mayhew / The Fresno Bee

Sunday, September 10, 2006

It seems Shawn Ferreria was born to forecast air pollution.

As a child, he built a weather station in the backyard of his family's Winton home, near Merced, comparing his temperature readings with those of official reports.

"I was watching the weather on TV and seeing how it all played out," he says. "It's just that daily routine. You can't hide from it."

Ferreria earned a degree in atmospheric science from the University of California at Davis. For the past five years, as an air-quality project planner for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, he's helped predict how brown our air will be the next day.

As the district's lead forecaster, he spends most of his workdays indoors at the computer. Outdoors, the sun beats down, and the Sierra mountain range to the east is little more than a suggestion, nearly obscured by the ugly curtain of haze we call our air.

When things are bad, he's one of four forecasters who issues Spare the Air day alerts that ask Valley residents to cut down on their driving and other energy consumption. When things are really bad, he issues health advisories that can postpone events and disrupt people's lives, all in an effort to keep them safe.

As summer winds down and the level of ozone in the air decreases, fewer Spare the Air days will occur. But even during winter, pollution is a problem. Particulates increase. Ferreria and his co-workers sometimes must set limits on wood-burning, both residential and agricultural.

A meteorologist's work is never done.

"What we do is different than the National Weather Service," he says. "They look at temperature and precipitation. Here at the air pollution control district, we throw in the human factor by looking at emissions."

Satellite images, computer models and data collected at seven monitoring stations throughout the Fresno area all contribute to his forecasts. But in the end, it's just educated guesswork. Even after years of predicting air quality, Ferreria occasionally gets it wrong.

"Every once in a while, we're caught off-guard," he says. "Mother Nature's in control. If she shows up early or late, that changes everything, and we can't do much about it."

The pieces of the air-quality puzzle

Identifying the threat: During summer, ozone is the biggest problem. It's a secondary pollutant, a gas caused by a combination of other pollutants (primarily nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds) baked by the sun. In most cases, the more heat and sunshine, the higher the ozone level, which is measured in parts per billion. Particulates, usually problematic during winter, are measured in micrograms per cubic meter.

Making the call: After checking the morning's pollutant numbers again in midafternoon, Ferreria decides whether to issue a Spare the Air advisory for the next day. Health advisories indicate even worse numbers and usually are issued immediately.

Satellite images: Weather patterns in the Pacific, from Washington to Mexico, can have an effect on not only temperatures, but also air quality here.

Fires: The smoke from controlled burns and lightning-strike fires in the wilderness sometimes affects our air. Forecasters use webcams that update a fire's status every minute or so from a

distance. Naturally occurring wildfires often are allowed to burn themselves out, but if the smoke is going to cause pollution problems, firefighters might be asked to control the blaze.

Data retrieval: Temperature, humidity, solar radiation, wind and pollution levels are measured by seven stations in the Fresno area and reported in real time by the district office's computer network.

Profilers: Dozens of devices throughout the state "tickle" the air and give forecasters the ability to see on their computer screens how the wind is moving at altitudes up to 12,000 feet. Some profilers are balloons, but most use radar to get the job done. Ferreria pays particularly close attention to one in Monterey. If the wind is moving fast enough and the cool temperatures are high enough to get over the coastal mountain range, the Valley will benefit from the dispersal of the cool marine air.

Recent trends: "In weather," Ferreria says, "it's all about yesterday, today and tomorrow." Ferreria compares today's numbers to those from 24 hours earlier before predicting the next day's numbers.

Air Quality Board Approves Revised Pollution Credit Policy -- Much to Critics' Displeasure

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Saturday, September 9, 2006

Builders of major new power plants will be allowed to buy air pollution credits originally set aside for hospitals, schools and other essential services under a proposal approved Friday by the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

AQMD staff and energy company representatives said the measure could keep the air from getting dirtier by creating enough reliable electricity so that diesel backup generators would not have to be used because of power shortages. They argued that traffic lights and other items necessary for public health would be powered by the plants.

But numerous students, residents of cities where plants could be built and lawyers for environmental groups said already polluted urban areas would be hit hard by large new power plants, and they weren't buying the public health argument.

"As an asthmatic resident of Huntington Park, it's hard enough already breathing on the way to school," said Ryan Perez, 17, who objected to a plant proposed in nearby Vernon. "You guys are supposed to make our air cleaner, not dirtier."

Mayra Gonzalez, 16, of Southgate said, "We've got diesel trucks, refineries ... and now you're adding these power plants. I don't see how you can compare working lights to working lungs. I just don't."

Six plants - in Industry, Carson, Vernon, Palmdale, Romoland and Victorville - could be the first to benefit from the revised pollution credit plan.

The board refused community requests to deny the proposal or postpone action on it, noting that either course could stall or kill construction of plants in high desert places such as Victorville that want them.

But it ordered staff to return in January with proposals that could set sharply higher prices for offsets if a plant were proposed in an area already affected by industrial air pollution, or other measures that would discourage building them there.

But even board chairman William Burke, who proposed the sliding price scale, said he was not

sure it would be legal.

AQMD Executive Director Barry Wallerstein said power companies applying for credits also would need to undergo rigorous permit reviews before a location was approved.

SoCal air regulators back policy revising air pollution credits

The Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Fresno Bee, Sacramento Bee and other papers, Saturday, September 9, 2006, 10:15 PM)

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Regional air regulators backed a measure letting builders of major new power plants buy air pollution credits originally designated for hospitals, schools and other services.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District approved the proposal Friday.

Supporters say the measure will help increase electricity supplies and cut usage of dirtier diesel backup generators.

But critics worry the measure will open urban areas to a wave of construction of large new power plants.

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Hundreds of Firefighters Battle Brush Fire Near Pyramid Lake

By Gregory W. Griggs, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Saturday, September 9, 2006

A 13,500-acre brush fire in the northern Ventura County wilderness continued to burn out of control Friday near the Pyramid Lake Recreation Area in Los Angeles County.

Fanned by 12 mph winds, the fire in the Los Padres National Forest was moving primarily northeast as hundreds of firefighters, assisted by more than a dozen water-dropping aircraft, battled the blaze at its outer edges, officials said. Plumes of smoke were visible from nearby Interstate 5.

"Essentially, the fire is moving in all directions," said Ed Lindquist, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service. "This fire's going to go on for a while."

The blaze forced the closure of numerous recreation areas in the forest, including the Alder Creek, Log Cabin and Little Mutau campgrounds and the picnic areas surrounding the lake, Lindquist said. In neighboring Angeles National Forest, the Oak Flat and Frenchman Flat camping areas were also closed.

As of late Friday, no injuries had been reported and no structures were threatened. There was no estimate on when the blaze might be contained.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District issued a smoke advisory for the Santa Clarita Valley and San Gabriel Mountains areas, including the community of Castaic and the cities of San Fernando, Pasadena and La Cañada Flintridge.

Ventura County air quality officials, however, said the fire had not yet posed a health problem.

"We'll be monitoring it, but I don't expect to issue an advisory," said Mallory Ham, an air pollution meteorologist for the county Air Pollution Control District. "If we get a shift in the weather, some of the smoke could drift down into our valleys, but it hasn't yet."

Overnight temperatures were expected to dip into the mid-30s, which should help firefighters. Bonnie Bartling, a National Weather Service weather specialist, said today's forecast calls for temperatures in the mid-80s, with humidity of 20% to 35% and winds in the higher elevations gusting up to 30 mph. Temperatures should be slightly cooler Sunday.

The Day fire - so named because it started shortly before 2 p.m. Labor Day - initially began in a remote area southwest of Pyramid Lake and within two miles of the Sespe Wilderness Condor Sanctuary. The endangered birds nest throughout the region and aren't in any immediate danger, officials said.

"The nearest birds that we're aware of are about 10 miles south, at Hopper Mountain," said Joe Pasinato, another spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service.

On Monday, about 12,000 campers and fishermen were evacuated from the recreation area when the fire erupted in the mountainous forest.

Because of the isolated terrain, fire crews were unable to reach the blaze for the first few days and relied on water-dropping aircraft to stem the flames.

But by the end of the day Friday, roughly 850 firefighters were battling the blaze on all fronts, with more than 100 others working in command posts, Lindquist said.

They were assisted by two air tankers and 16 water-dropping helicopters.

The cause of the blaze, which so far has cost more than \$1.4 million to fight, is under investigation.

Los Padres, the secondlargest national forest in the state, encompasses about 1.75 million acres of central California's coast and mountain ranges.

The forest, which includes the famed Big Sur coastline, stretches from Monterey County into northern San Luis Obispo County and Ventura, Santa Barbara and Kern counties.

According to the Forest Service, wildfires have burned a total of more than 2.3 million acres in the Los Padres forest since 1912, for a historic average of nearly 25,000 acres annually. Chaparral accounts for more than 95% of the acreage burned each year by wildfire.

Road money spread thin in transportation bond

By Aaron C. Davis, Associated Press Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, September 9, 2006

SACRAMENTO, (AP) -- When Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger announced an ambitious public works plan in January, he touted it in part as a way to improve more than 1,000 miles of state roads and build hundreds of miles of carpool lanes on California's busiest freeways.

Democrats later shrank the pavement-laying portion of that proposal and substituted billions for bus, rail and other urban transit projects, but supporters have stuck to their public message since the latest version was placed on the November ballot. The bond, they say, would largely build roads and ease the lives of California's legions of freeway commuters.

On Web sites and in fliers soon to be mailed to California voters, a coalition supported by Schwarzenegger and his Democratic opponent, state Treasurer Phil Angelides, hundreds of state and local officials, contractors, labor unions and others reinforce the message: According to the coalition's Web site, the bond will provide funding first and foremost to "fix the state's most dangerous highways, clear freeway bottlenecks and help prevent air pollution."

Proposition 1B, the largest single bond ever placed before California voters, would certainly provide billions to do just that.

But a detailed review by The Associated Press also shows that more than 40 percent of the nearly \$20 billion will not go toward the well-advertised road projects. Rather, billions will go toward projects that have tenuous connections to relieving the state's worst traffic jams.

New fences around ports in Long Beach and Oakland, school buses for Los Angeles, and security cameras and disaster-plan studies for San Francisco's subway and ferry terminals are just a few of the projects that would see a slice of the money if voters say yes.

Billions also would go to buying land for railroad crossings, expanding programs to reduce harmful emissions and perhaps even building a new border crossing into Mexico.

"Will it make your commute better? That's a tough question to answer and a promise we're not ready to make," said John Barna, executive director of the nine-member California Transportation Commission, which would be charged with deciding how almost \$12 billion of the bond money would be spent.

That much of the money would go to projects that will not have a direct effect on easing California's notorious freeway congestion is a consequence of political reality in a state with a Republican governor and Democrat-controlled Legislature.

Lawmakers carved up funding for dozens of programs to win bipartisan and regional support in suburban Republican areas and urban Democratic strongholds. The compromises also were a way to ensure the bond made it on the November ballot as part of a \$37.3 billion package of public works measures. The other infrastructure bonds would raise money for levee repairs, school construction and affordable housing.

The transportation bond's official title, the "Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality and Port Security Bond Act of 2006," should serve as much as a description for voters as a disclaimer that it contains money for far more than road repairs.

The AP's examination found that it spreads money across so many potential projects that some experts question if there will be enough set aside for any one region to make a noticeable dent in highway traffic.

In one example of the something-for-everyone approach, the bond guarantees each of California's 478 incorporated cities at least \$400,000 for transportation projects - regardless of whether they have been approved as regional or statewide priorities.

"I would say there is a question of can this very large package - broken up in a lot of components and spread out across all the regions of the state - really make a difference over the life of the bond?" said Mark Baldassare, director of research at the nonprofit Public Policy Institute of California. "I think it's a big question, and I don't think the proponents want to oversell this."

To Barna and other members of the California Transportation Commission, there is no question the money is needed. The agency estimated recently that unfunded transportation needs in the state would hit \$160 billion by the end of the decade.

They consider the \$20 billion provided by Proposition 1B as a mere down payment on fixing the state's road system.

"I think this bond would get us to the place where we would be ready to start making peoples' commutes better," Barna said. "We're talking about enhancing the building blocks. Maybe that means building a component that can shave off 10 or 15 minutes here, or allow you to take a bus there. That's where we're getting to with this bond."

Indirectly, almost all the bond money would go to easing congestion, he said. That's because in California, one size doesn't fit all for helping commuters.

Some take buses, others use rail. As a result, improvements to an array of public transit agencies are needed to alleviate congestion, just as new lanes are.

In some cases, supporters say the bond money is needed as a way to begin buying land and preparing for the next generation of rail lines and other mass-transit corridors.

The borrowing plan represents a much-needed investment in the state's future, said James Earp, executive director of the California Alliance for Jobs, which represents 1,700 construction companies and is helping orchestrate the upcoming television and mail campaign for the bond.

That is especially true as California's expanding population threatens to make traffic jams even worse, he said.

"It's like a new roof job," Earp said. "When you need it, you need it and you go to the bank and borrow. That's what we're doing here. We're taking out a home-improvement loan for California ..."

But in borrowing billions, Proposition 1B also would mark a major policy shift in funding transportation projects in California.

For the past two decades, the state has paid for road projects largely through ongoing taxes and fees on gasoline. Under the bond measure, the state would borrow against its general fund to pay for improvements that may be obsolete by the time they're paid for.

For example, even the measure's supporters acknowledge that buses and rail cars purchased with bond money could end up in the junkyard before the bond would be paid off in 2037.

Among the key findings in the AP's review of the bond:

- _ At least \$8.7 billion - about 43 percent - will not go directly for road work. Instead, the money will pay for bus, rail, freight, air quality and security projects.
- _ Of the \$11.3 billion that could go for roads, less than half is dedicated to reducing congestion on what the state considers to be "high-priority corridors" on highways and other major routes.
- _ The only road project guaranteed funding is Highway 99 through the Central Valley. It will get \$1 billion, although experts say it will take six times that amount to bring it up to interstate highway standards.
- _ In most other cases, it's still unclear how most of the money would be spent. The bond has divided the road money into categories and has left most funding decisions in the hands of the state transportation commission.
- _ Despite the references to highway safety and port security in the bond's title, less than 4 percent of the money would go to the state's main fund for highway safety projects. Supporters say additional lanes and other such projects also would improve safety. And just one half of 1 percent - \$100 million - would go to grants for port security.

_ Local governments already are angling to use billions of dollars for so-called "trade corridor improvements" and money earmarked for ports to fund projects that have not previously made the cut for state funding. In San Diego, for example, officials are preparing a plan to spend hundreds of millions of dollars in bond money on a third major border crossing to Mexico. Kim Kawada, executive program manager of the San Diego Association of Governments, said that while the group's board hasn't yet approved it, the agency is hoping to compete with the ports in Oakland and Long Beach for bond funding.

"We think the border crossing is going to compete well," Kawada said of the project the association has been considering for years. "The border is kind of a different issue, but it affects the economy of the entire region and state, it's not just about sea ports."

_ The bond allocates \$1 billion to reduce emissions related to the movement of goods, presumably referring to train and truck emissions on heavily traveled trucking routes and Central Valley railroad corridors. But the Legislature did not empower a state agency to design or manage the program or to cut checks to pay for it.

_ The bond also invests \$1 billion for transit security. But some question if that's an appropriate use of borrowed bond money because the state is supposed to be receiving federal homeland security funds for such improvements.

"That seems like a federal domain," said Jean Ross, executive director of the nonprofit California Budget Project, noting that 10 times more funding was going to such projects than port security, which is in the bond's title.

Over the life of the bond, taxpayers also would pay far more than its \$19.9 billion total.

As is common with bonds, the state would pay nearly \$1 in interest for every dollar spent. The total payback over 30 years would be \$38.9 billion, according to the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office.

That's greater than the annual general fund budgets of every state except New York and California.

The amount of borrowing the state will incur for the transportation and other bonds is one reason some Republicans are speaking out against them.

Jon Fleischman, a former executive director of the California Republican Party who now publishes the Republican Web site FlashReport.org, criticized the transportation bond last month during the state party convention.

"... There are tons and tons of programs in that bond that are not bricks and mortar transportation projects and that most people would not think of when you tell them they're voting on a roads bond," Fleischman said. "It's a social-engineering program designed to move people out of cars, not to fix the roads they drive on."

State Republican Party Chairman Duff Sundheim said he disagreed with Fleischman and noted that party delegates voted overwhelmingly to endorse the bond.

State senator Tom McClintock, a Republican candidate for lieutenant governor, also spoke out against the bond before voting against it when the public works package was placed on the ballot in May.

McClintock said bonds should be used only for capital projects that last at least as long as the state would be paying for them.

"If our children are called upon 30 years from now to repay a bond, they should have the full benefit of the project built with that bond," McClintock said on the Senate floor. "Bonds are seductive. They promise immediate gratification, but they conceal a heavy price."

Schwarzenegger first cast road improvements as a major part of any bond package during his State of the State address in January. He released a 10-year plan that relied heavily on bonds to help fund \$107 billion in transportation improvements.

Democrats, however, opposed that and other components of his \$222 billion "strategic growth plan" as too grandiose, saying it would cap the state's ability to borrow money for other needs in the future. They also wanted more money for public transit projects.

In May, the two sides agreed on the nearly \$20 billion transportation bond and have made promises about its potential since then. Schwarzenegger's bill-signing ceremony was held in the median near the entrance to an often-clogged freeway tunnel in the San Francisco Bay Area.

"We will build more freeways, and more lanes, especially HOV lanes and more mass transit, more onramps and off-ramps, more bridges and so on, all in order to ease the traffic congestion and improve the air quality," he said at the time.

Paul Hefner, a spokesman for the pro-bond campaign led in part by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, said supporters have made no secret that a lot of the bond money would go to fund projects other than roads.

Hefner said the bus and rail lines that make up the backbone of the state's public transportation systems deserve a piece of the pie because they've been equally underfunded over the years. He characterized the bond as a first step in fixing all those needs.

"We can't promise voters that this (bond) is going to instantly change peoples' lives," Hefner said. "We can say that this is going to set aside a significant amount of money to begin fixing the problem."

Yet by failing to set up a more sustainable way to pay for the state's ever-expanding transportation needs, the bond might actually move the state backward by creating too much debt for the sake of one-time fixes, said Stuart Cohen, executive director of the Oakland-based Transportation and Land Use Coalition.

Along with the bond, the Legislature should have packaged reforms to index the 18-cent gas tax to inflation, Cohen said. That move alone would have raised about \$45 billion for transportation projects over the next 30 years, he said.

Regardless of its merits, the bond would be historic if approved by California voters, who have passed just two of five transportation bonds in the last 20 years, according to the California Budget Project.

"Obviously, roads are important to many people, but different voters care about different things," said Ross, the group's executive director. "We'll see if it's got enough things for enough people, or too many things for too many people."

Green bills await governor's pen

Measures will test Schwarzenegger's environmental resolve, activists say.

By Judy Lin - Bee Capitol Bureau
Sacramento Bee, Sunday, September 10, 2006

Emboldened by the success of California's anti-global warming initiative, environmentalists are now eyeing other green bills that they believe can help save the planet.

More than 20 high-priority bills are on their way to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's desk, including one on flex-fuel cars and another that would mandate cleaner power plants. There are less

publicized bills such as one that would require most grocery stores to offer plastic bag recycling, and another that would reduce the amount of water used in every toilet flush.

However stringent or unusual, each will test the Republican governor's environmental resolve, advocates say.

It's the opportunity between having a good year vs. a great year -- and, most significantly, a legacy for the governor," said V. John White, legislative director of the Clean Power Campaign, a nonprofit coalition of environmental, scientific and public interest groups working to expand the use of renewable energy.

For the past two years, the California League of Conservation Voters has given Schwarzenegger a 58 percent rating on its environmental score card based on bills most important to the environmental community.

Former Gov. Gray Davis, in contrast, received 85 percent in 2001, 75 percent in 2002 and 100 percent in 2003.

While the governor is being applauded for striking a deal with Democratic leaders in the Legislature to cut the state's carbon dioxide emissions by 25 percent under the Global Warming Solutions Act, also known as Assembly Bill 32, advocates are hoping he'll support other sweeping changes in the name of air quality, clean water and public health.

From a companion bill to AB 32 that tries to wean utilities off dirty coal consumption to a tax checkoff for sea otter research, each bill seeks to promote conservation.

"AB 32 is only going to be successful if we have strong tools that will let us meet those targets," said Ann Notthoff, state advocacy director for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "The governor this year has been given strong tools."

The governor has already signed one bill that completes his solar roof initiative. Senate Bill 1 directs the California Public Utilities Commission to fund an incentive program to reward consumers for installing solar energy systems.

Another bill on its way to his desk, Assembly Bill 2723 by Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, would set aside 10 percent of the funding from the solar initiative for low-income projects every year.

Environmentalists are also hoping the governor won't take a second pass on a statewide biomonitoring program to measure harmful chemicals in Californians. Schwarzenegger vetoed the bill last year over concerns that it would cause unintended panic.

Sen. Deborah Ortiz, D-Sacramento, said after her bill passed the Legislature that she's hopeful the governor will sign the new version, Senate Bill 1379.

The governor has yet to take a position on many environmental bills, resulting in intense lobbying on all sides.

Among the most contested environmental bills on his desk are these:

- Senate Bill 1368 by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland. Designed to be a companion bill to AB 32, this bill seeks to curb coal consumption by directing the state's Energy Commission to set cleaner emissions standards for utilities.
- Assembly Bill 1012 by Assemblyman Joe Nation, D-San Rafael. Requires half of all new cars sold in the state to run on alternative fuels by 2020.

The Western States Petroleum Association, which represents oil companies and refineries, is lobbying against both of those bills, saying they would mandate changes where there might not be a market or an infrastructure in place.

"Our concern with that legislation, and with any alternative fuel legislation, involves our opposition to mandates," said spokesman Tupper Hull. "When you impose, you distort the market, and it almost always harms the consumers."

Hull noted that the state is producing roughly 45 million gallons of gas a day -- just barely enough to keep up with the state's demand. The state is importing another 3.5 million gallons a day, he said.

Rico Mastrodonato, Northern California director for the California League of Conservation Voters, believes that should motivate the governor to support the two bills.

"If we're maxing out, that's just another reason to reduce our use," he said.

- Senate Bill 927 by Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, which would impose a \$30 fee per 20-foot container moving through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to mitigate air pollution around those ports, fund rail improvements and enhance port security. Industry officials say the fee could raise \$500 million a year.

Supporters argue it's only fair that the owners of the cargo help maintain infrastructure around one of the largest sources of air pollution in the area. They are hoping for the governor's signature.

The shipping industry, however, plans to sue if the bill gets the governor's signature. It is unconstitutional for states to mandate fees on interstate commerce, said Robin Lanier, executive director of the Waterfront Coalition in Washington, D.C.

"If we allowed one state to do it," Lanier said, "we'd fall back to the year 1789 where every state is taxing commerce on everyone else."

Pending environmental bills

- Assembly Bill 1012 by Assemblyman Joe Nation, D-San Rafael; would require half of all new cars sold in the state to run on alternative fuels by 2020.
 - Assembly Bill 2449 by Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys; would require most grocery stores to provide plastic bag recycling.
 - Assembly Bill 2496 by Assemblyman John Laird, D-Santa Cruz; would require new toilets to reduce water use -- from an average of 1.6 gallons per flush to 1.3 gallons for regular toilets and from 1 gallon to 0.5 gallon for urinals.
 - Senate Bill 927 by Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach; would impose a \$30 fee per 20-foot container moving through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, with a portion going to air pollution mitigation.
 - Senate Bill 1368 by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland; would curb coal consumption by directing the state's Energy Commission to set emissions standards for the utility industry.
 - Senate Bill 1379 by Perata and Sen. Deborah Ortiz, D-Sacramento; creates a voluntary biomonitoring program for individuals to learn what chemicals are present in their bodies. The data would be used for research to determine links between certain chemicals and diseases.
- Source: California Legislature

Professor Gets \$1.2 Million Tech Prize

By Matti Huuataanen, Associated Press Writer
In the S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, September 10, 2006

HELSINKI, Finland (AP) -- The winner of a \$1.2 million prize for his inventions in light and laser technology said Friday he will give away some of his money to promote research at universities and organizations that help developing countries.

Shuji Nakamura, now a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, received the Millennium Technology Prize on Friday from Finnish President Tarja Halonen on the sidelines of a meeting of European Union finance ministers and central bankers in Helsinki.

The award, announced in June, was for his work in developing the blue light-emitting diode, or LED, widely used in traffic signals, mobile phones and illumination, as well as for packing information onto disks. LED lights have long lives, consume far less energy than normal incandescent lamps, can be used to provide clean drinking water and help cut down on pollution.

Nakamura, 52, whose high-profile patent dispute challenged the Japanese tradition of selfless devotion to employers, said he was "deeply honored" to receive the award. He identified Light Up the World and Engineers Without Borders as among the groups that will share his prize money.

"We have only just begun to realize the great potential of blue LEDs and laser diodes to improve the human quality of life," he told an audience of Finnish and foreign dignitaries.

"I hope this helps us to raise awareness of the potential of (such) lighting to reduce global warming, to provide drinking water and to create inexpensive and unlimited information storage" on discs, such as DVDs, he added.

The biennial prize - "for a technological innovation that significantly improves the quality of human life" - was awarded for the second time since it was established in 2002. Two years ago, its recipient was Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web.

Nakamura said his original goal was to give engineers and designers a greater palette of LED colors with which to work.

The blue LED's ultraviolet properties give it endless other applications, Nakamura said, including to clean air and water, so it can counter pollution in places like China and India and sanitize refrigerator interiors and other spots where bacteria thrive.

Last year, Nakamura and his former employer, Nichia Corp., reached a \$8 million settlement in a high-profile dispute over a lucrative lighting technology patent. The case brought Nakamura fame, symbolizing the struggle of the individual worker against companies over intellectual property in Japan, a nation where selfless corporate devotion has long been the rule.

The Millennium Prize Foundation is an independent fund supported by the Finnish government and several Finnish companies and organizations. The eight-member international selection committee studied 109 nominations from 32 countries for this year's prize.

[Sacramento Bee commentary, Monday, Sept. 11, 2006:](#)

Another view: Pollution trading isn't only solution

By Curtis Moore - Special to the Bee

Curtis Moore is responding to The Bee's Aug. 25 editorial "Highly climactic / Sides need to give on global warming bill." Moore is an author and international consultant based in McLean, Va. He also coedits and publishes the nonprofit Health & Clean Air newsletter, which can be found at healthandcleanair.org.

Because I've worked in the environmental field for nearly 30 years, 11 of them as Republican counsel to the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, I follow California developments closely. Usually they're encouraging, but not so with the uncritical support of pollution trading as a way to curb global warming, evidenced by your editorial, which stated: "Pollution trading programs have effectively reduced acid rain and other emissions across the country... ."

Despite this common belief, trading simply doesn't work, if the measure of success is whether health and environmental objectives are met, not whether polluters save money. Lakes and soils in the Northeast remain acid, for example, and probably will be so for another half-century. Other

trading programs have included leaded gasoline, which meant the United States required 25 years to finish a job China did in three, and the Los Angeles RECLAIM smog program failed miserably and was rife with fraud.

Carbon cap-and-trade in Europe is now on the ropes because industries lied about their pollution. In the words of a Bloomberg Report, trading there "is failing to meet the Kyoto Protocol's carbon-dioxide emission standards. Rather than help protect the environment, the trading system has led to increases in electricity prices of more than 50 percent and record profits."

The popularity of trading is due in part to disenchantment with government in general and regulation in particular. The choice, however, is not between trading and rules, because there are market mechanisms that have succeeded fabulously.

The Swedes, for example, cornered the global market for low-sulfur fuel with a "feebate" -- taxing high sulfur products and rebating the money to low sulfur versions. Not one dime stuck to government's hands.

Japan produced the world's cleanest refineries and power plants by requiring companies to compensate nearly 100,000 victims of air pollution. The U.S. "Superfund" revolutionized the chemical industry's previously cavalier approach to its toxic wastes by requiring companies to pay every last cent of cleanup costs, whether they were negligent or not. Germany steers consumers toward clean products with its "Blue Angel" labels.

If any agency can make trading work, it is the air pollution agency that many, myself included, consider the world's best, the California Air Resources Board. But to compel the board to use only trading is akin to pushing a NASCAR driver onto the track in a car with no steering wheel or brakes.

Thoughts about the southern Sierra Nevada

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, Sept. 9, 2006

An interesting assignment came my way a few weeks ago.

The board of directors of the new California State Sierra Nevada Conservancy came to Tulare County, and I was asked to say a few words to the group about what makes the southern Sierra Nevada different from the rest of the range.

The short answer I came up with was that there are lots of distinctive things about our end of California's mountain spine. There are so many, in fact, that we tend to underestimate just how different is our southern Sierran world from the mountain country that stretches north from the Kings River to Plumas County and the Feather River.

Some of the most obvious and significant differences have to do with the basic geography of the range. From the Kings River north, Sierran rivers are born on the crest of the range and flow pretty much westward to the Great Central Valley.

Since the crest is very near the eastern edge of the mountains, the western slope of the Central and Northern Sierra is long and gradual.

Everything geographical down here is different. In the land of the Kaweah, Tule and Kern rivers, the immediate western slope of the Sierra is short and very, very precipitous.

Our Kaweah River, in fact, just may be the steepest river in North America; it drops well over two miles in not much more than 50 river miles!

This is why the mountain view from Visalia is so impressive on a clear day. Nowhere else in the Sierra are high peaks so close to the valley floor.

Our southern Sierra has a double crest. Behind the mountains visible from Visalia is a south-draining alpine headwaters that gives birth to the Kern River. What this means is that the

southern Sierra has much more high country and much less foothill land than most of the rest of the range.

It is this wonderful high country that is preserved in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and the Giant Sequoia National Monument and Golden Trout Wilderness of the Sequoia National Forest.

The downside of all this (is there a geographical pun here?) is that the southern Sierra's steep western slope makes our end of the mountains much more susceptible to [air pollution](#) problems. Put simply, the high country of Tulare County is closer to the dirty air of the San Joaquin Valley, and the steep west-facing slope absorbs lots of heat from the afternoon sun, which provides the energy required to move the dirty air up most summer afternoons to 7,000, 8,000 or even 9,000 feet above sea level.

There is an even bigger potential problem that is likely to result from our steep mountain face.

The forests that grow on it are going to be at especially high risk to the effects of climate change.

A recent report from the California State Environmental Protection Agency, a part of Gov. Schwarzenegger's administration, forecasts that barring very significant and prompt changes in our energy-use habits, we may see as much as a 6- to 10-degree temperature increase within the century we have already begun.

If this forecast proves accurate, it would likely devastate our local forests. A change of 10 degrees would mean that the forests that now grow best between 5,000 and 7,000 feet in altitude would need to move uphill between 2,000 and 3,000 feet.

This would require the giant sequoias to move almost to where our timberline species have grown for the past few millennia.

Because the mountain is so steep, such a change would require the wholesale movement of natural organisms, many of them individually long-lived and relatively slow growing. There would be very little buffer available. This is a daunting thought, to say the least.

There's much more to say about our southern Sierra and how it's different - much of it positive - but I've used up today's space. I'll continue next time.

Three Rivers resident William Tweed writes about the natural world of Tulare County. His column, copyrighted and printed by permission, appears every other week in Life.

[Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, Sept. 11, 2006](#)

Encourage hybrid sales

Editor: The year is 2300 AD, and your descendant -- let's call him Matty -- just turned 12. Today little Matty, a resident of the metropolis we currently know as Merced, wants to go to the beach. That's fine. His parents don't mind the drive to the coast; after all, it's only about five minutes away. That's right, gone are Carmel, Monterey, San Francisco, San Diego, Pismo, and all those other good places. Their fate has all gone the way of Atlantis.

Now you might call me crazy, and you might say that I'm overreacting and dramatizing. In that, my friend, you are wrong. The federal government currently gives a nice little tax credit for buyers of hybrid vehicles, which no doubt fuels the desire for them. States also kick in some goodies; the state of California for example allows drivers of hybrids to drive in the carpool lane even if they are driving alone.

The government is beginning to phase out the tax credits for popular models of hybrids. Under the current tax code, buyers of a Toyota hybrid after Sept. 30 will only qualify for half of the credit than they would receive if they bought one today.

As for all of the other hybrid models from all of the other makers, once the sales of a particular model reach 60,000, tax incentives are decreased. In April of 2007, tax credits for hybrid Toyota

and Lexus models will be cut to 25 percent of their current value, and then will be completely phased out in October of next year.

What is the world coming to? Rather, what is the United States coming to? While the rest of the world's citizens are hopping on their bikes, Americans are roaring up our SUVs. Before we just completely and totally give up on trying to save the world for our descendants. And it sure seems like the current population doesn't care. And why should they? It's not like they'll be around.

I hope that our government officials will soon come to realize that hybrid/low emissions vehicles should not be a choice but mandatory.

ADAM COX

Merced

[Letter to the Editor, Washington Post, Sept. 9, 2006](#)

No More Manure Rules Needed

As a farmer who was quoted in the Aug. 28 news story "Pollution in the Water, Lawsuits in the Air" and who raises chickens on a family farm in Oklahoma, I feel compelled to correct the story's imbalance.

My husband, Al, and I consider ourselves stewards of the environment; we apply chicken waste responsibly to our fields as an affordable, natural fertilizer. Contrary to the assertion in the first sentence of the article, chicken litter conscientiously applied does not lead to water pollution "every time the rain comes down." Our drinking water comes from a spring that flows into the Illinois River. We wouldn't pollute our own drinking water or anyone else's.

The article failed to note what really scares farmers: that it makes no sense for the attorney general of Oklahoma or any other official to sue our industry under the drastic liability provisions of the 1980 Superfund law intended to clean up abandoned industrial toxic waste sites. The Clean Water Act and plenty of other federal and state laws and regulations apply to agriculture. Ignored in the article's reference to the settlement in the Waco, Tex., case is the fact that eight of the 14 dairies sued by the city went out of business. Oklahoma poultry farmers fear the same future, even though we are following the laws the state legislature passed in the 1990s.

Our small organization of mostly family farmers, Poultry Partners Inc., along with most national and state farm organizations and state agricultural commissioners, supports legislation in Congress to clarify that the Superfund law -- and only that law -- does not apply to manure.

BEV SAUNDERS

Colcord, Okla.