

Foundation offers \$589,000 in grant funds

Wednesday, August 19, 2009

By For The Madera Tribune

FRESNO - Deadlines are fast approaching for \$589,000 available during the Fresno Regional Foundation's 2009 Human Services Grant Cycle.

The Foundation will consider applications from existing organizations with new or ongoing programs that serve the central San Joaquin Valley in the areas of education, economy, environmental, social and health.

Applicants must submit an organizational profile by Sept. 4. Applications are due by Sept. 11. A bidders' meeting is scheduled for August 25 from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. in the University of California, Merced, Fresno Center at 550 E. Shaw Ave., Suite 100 in Fresno.

Of the \$589,000 in grants available, there is \$200,000 earmarked for Teen Pregnancy Prevention, \$200,000 for the San Joaquin River, \$109,000 for Air Quality and \$80,000 for general Human Services.

Note: The above article has been shortened from its published form in The Madera Tribune newspaper.

A helping hand from Uncle Sam

By J.N. Sbranti

Modesto Bee, Sunday, Aug. 16, 2009

You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

The government has figured that out, so it's offering a multitude of sweet deals to lure consumers into doing what it wants.

Tax credits, rebates and deep discounts are offered by assorted agencies to get Americans to do everything from stimulate the economy and buy houses to use less energy and pursue college educations.

Beyond trading in your clunker for cash, there's money offered for planting trees, scrapping refrigerators, insulating walls, replacing windows, buying hybrid vehicles and more.

The incentives can be combined, so consumers can get rebates from more than one agency for the same thing, such as installing solar panels or replacing old cars.

Here's a sampling of who's offering what:

VEHICLE DEALS

- **Cash for Clunkers:** Consumers can receive a \$3,500 or \$4,500 discount when they trade in their old vehicle and purchase or lease a new one by Nov. 1 or until the program runs out of money.

The size of the credit depends on the type of vehicle purchased and the difference in fuel economy between it and the trade-in vehicle.

The new vehicle must have a manufacturer's suggested retail price of not more than \$45,000. The new car also must have a combined fuel economy value of at least 22 miles per gallon.

The trade-in must have been manufactured less than 25 years ago, have a combined city-highway fuel economy of 18 miles per gallon or less, be in drivable condition and be continuously insured and registered to the same owner for the past year.

For more details on the Consumer Assistance to Recycle and Save program, call 866-227-7891 or go online to www.cars.gov.

- **Car sales tax:** State and local sales and excise taxes paid on the purchase of new vehicles can be deducted from federal income taxes, even if the taxpayer does not itemize deductions.

The deduction is limited to the tax on up to \$49,500 of the purchase price. The deduction is phased out for joint filers with modified adjusted gross income of \$250,000 to \$260,000 and other taxpayers with modified incomes of \$125,000 to \$135,000.

Get details at www.irs.gov.

- Hybrid vehicles: Tax credits are offered to those who purchase certain new hybrid cars before Dec. 31, 2010. The vehicles must have drive trains powered by an internal combustion engine and a rechargeable battery.

The 2009 vehicles qualified for credits include the Cadillac Escalade Hybrid 2WD, \$2,200; Chevrolet Tahoe Hybrid C1500 2WD, \$2,200; Chrysler Aspen Hybrid, \$2,200; Dodge Durango Hybrid, \$2,200; Ford Escape Hybrid 2WD, \$3,000; GMC Sierra Hybrid C15 2WD, \$2,200; Mazda Tribute Hybrid 2WD, \$3,000; Mercury Mariner Hybrid 2WD, \$3,000; Nissan Altima Hybrid, \$2,350; and Saturn Aura Hybrid, \$1,550.

Get details at www.irs.gov.

- Plug-in electric vehicles: Two types of federal tax credits are available for various types of electric vehicles, including those commonly referred to as neighborhood electric vehicles.

Low- speed or two- or three-wheel electric vehicles, such as motor scooters, purchased after Feb. 17, 2010 and until Jan. 1, 2012 can get a credit of up to 10 percent of the cost of the vehicle to a maximum \$2,500.

For four-wheel vehicles that draw propulsion using a rechargeable traction battery, the rebates ranges from \$2,500 to \$15,000, depending on the weight of the vehicle and the capacity of the battery.

Get details at www.irs.gov.

- Polluting vehicles: The [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) offers \$1,000 cash or \$5,000 toward a newer, cleaner vehicle when someone retires an old vehicle.

Fairbanks asks public opinion on air pollution

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, August 21, 2009

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—The Fairbanks North Star Borough scheduled a public hearing Thursday night to ask voters' opinion on an air pollution.

The assembly is considering a ballot question asking whether it should take the lead on pollution-prevention measures, such as a buyback program for inefficient wood- and coal-fired furnaces.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation has said it will draft and enforce pollution-prevention measures if local officials decline to do so.

State air quality director Alice Edwards has said the federal Clean Air Act requires the state to step in if local government fails to act.

EPA seeks public comment on power plants

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, August 21, 2009

FARMINGTON, N.M.—The Environmental Protection Agency is seeking public comment on an analysis and options for reducing air pollution from two power plants in the Four Corners area.

Environmental groups have raised concerns about air quality and visibility associated with the Navajo Station and Four Corners Power Plant and the effects at regional national parks, wilderness areas and national monuments.

The EPA is providing a 30-day public comment period. This fall, the agency will propose how to reduce air pollution from the two plants.

Officials also will accept comments on other issues, such as the remaining useful life of the facilities, existing controls at the plants, energy and environmental effects that are not associated with air pollution.

Nevada, Calif. to battle Tahoe's invasive species

By Scott Sonner, The Associated Press

San Diego Union-Tribune, Friday, August 21, 2009

ROUND HILL PINES BEACH, Nev. — Nevada and California agreed Thursday to jointly mount a counterattack against invasive species that pose an increasing threat to Lake Tahoe's azure waters.

Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons and California Secretary of Natural Resources Mike Chrisman signed the agreement during an environmental summit that annually brings together scientists, politicians, federal land managers and conservationists to get updates on the condition of the lake and new potential sources of harm to its famed clarity.

"Those of us in the political arena come from many different political points of view but we come together when we talk about Lake Tahoe," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

"That little line that goes down the middle of the lake between our two states is not a line that divides us, it is a line that joins us," added Gibbons, a Republican.

While catastrophic wildfires, air pollution and erosion continue to pose threats to the lake, new research shows a major infestation of nonnative Asian clams could cause even more trouble.

"This is another battle," said Sen. John Ensign, R-Nevada, this year's formal host of the event. "It seems like every time we start having a victory we have another battle come along."

The dime-sized clams are believed to be linked to a major algae bloom last summer and experts said they could help other invaders, quagga and zebra mussels, successfully establish at the lake. Densities of clam beds have increased dramatically since the first discovery in 2002.

"Invasive species are one of the greatest threats to Lake Tahoe and the Tahoe basin," said Allen Biaggi, head of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. "If invasive mussels get a toe hold in Lake Tahoe, it will only be a matter of time before they get into the Truckee River and ultimately Pyramid Lake."

Sudeep Chandra, an assistant professor specializing in research into the impact of land changes on freshwater ecosystems at the University of Nevada, Reno, said the joint agreement is a "great step" toward protecting the lake.

The management plan will include efforts to prevent new introductions of species to the Lake Tahoe basin, limit the spread of existing populations and "abate the harmful ecological, economic, social and public health impacts" resulting from such species.

"Once established in the lake, invasive species can alter the lake's biodiversity, change the lake's clarity and affect our recreational opportunities," Chandra said.

In addition to the clams and mussels, nonnative species in the lake include warm water fish like bluegills and largemouth bass as well as plants like the Eurasian watermilfoil. At least 20 nonnative species have been found, Chandra said.

"The good news is that many of them are in the early stages of advancement," he said. "Our research has shown you can manage these populations if you get to them immediately."

A study by scientists at the University of California-Davis released this week found up to 3,000 Asian clams per square meter in the lake's shallow waters on the southeast shore between Zephyr Point and Elk Point. Ensign toured the area in a boat Thursday morning.

"It really was shocking to see the numbers and see the dead shells that have been laid down," he said.

Feinstein, who has visited the lake for 60 years and spent many childhood summers there at camps, showed off a pair of Asian clam earrings.

"When you look at them they are a thing of beauty. But if you think of what they can do to foul your water, kill algae, put it up on the beach and have a rotting mess, you won't appreciate the Asian clam," she said.

"Without direct specific action, we could lose this lake faster than anyone believes," she said. "If we don't get a stranglehold on them, they will get a stranglehold on this lake."

SD board OKs air quality permit for oil refinery

By Chet Brokaw, The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, San Diego Union-Tribune and other papers, Friday, August 21, 2009

PIERRE, S.D. — A state board voted unanimously Thursday to approve an air quality permit for a \$10 billion oil refinery that Hyperion Resources wants to build in southeastern South Dakota.

The Board of Minerals and Environment found that Dallas-based Hyperion has met the requirements set in state laws and rules. It endorsed the state Environment Department's recommendation to issue the permit for the first new U.S. oil refinery built since 1976.

Ed Cable, a leader of opponents who live near the project, said they will likely file a court appeal to try to overturn the board's decision.

Opponents, which include the Sierra Club and local groups Save Union County and Citizens Opposed to Oil Pollution, contend that the proposed refinery near Elk Point would emit too much pollution and hurt the quality of life in the area. Hyperion argues it will be a clean, modern plant that will reduce the nation's dependence on oil from overseas.

Hyperion Vice President Preston Phillips said approval of the air quality permit was a key step in the company's plan to start construction in 2011 and begin operations in 2015. The project still needs two state water permits and a federal wetlands permit, he said.

"We're ecstatic, very excited," Phillips said. "I think the permit reflects Hyperion's commitment to responsibly developing a project in terms of the environment."

Board members heard about 10 days of testimony spread over the past few months. Before voting Thursday, they noted that the project has split the community, with some supporting it as an economic boost and others opposing it as a polluting disruption of rural life.

Board member Timothy Johns said refineries are needed in the middle of the nation.

"I think without a doubt we're going to need oil refineries in this country for generations to come," Johns said. "Everybody says they want one, but don't want it in my back yard."

The refinery would be located on 3,800 acres of farmland north of Elk Point. It would process 400,000 barrels of Canadian tar sands crude oil each day into low-sulfur gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and liquid petroleum gas.

The project also would include a power plant that produces electricity for the refinery. It would use a byproduct of the refinery process, solid petroleum coke, which would be turned into gas and burned to produce electrical power. The gasification would allow the removal of more pollutants, the company says.

"The Hyperion Energy Center is a world-class facility that is state-of-the-art and is committed to industrial and environmental excellence," Hyperion lawyer Rick Addison told the board in closing arguments Thursday. "If we are going to build industrial facilities in the United States, we have to build in a world where we can no longer be casual about pollutants."

Robert Graham of Chicago, a lawyer representing opponents of the project, said the board should deny the permit because the refinery would emit a lot of pollution, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide and fine particles. Hyperion also has failed to prove the project would meet air quality standards or would use the best available technology, he said.

ND burns off natural gas due to lack of pipelines

By James MacPherson - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Thursday, Aug. 20, 2009

BISMARCK, N.D. -- Enough natural gas to heat every home in North Dakota through at least two brutal winters was burned off as an unmarketable byproduct in the state's oil patch in 2008, records obtained by The Associated Press show.

North Dakota produced a record 62.8 million barrels of oil last year, up nearly 18 million barrels from 2007. Natural gas, a byproduct of oil production, was pegged at 86 billion cubic feet - of which 26 billion cubic feet was "flared" because of the lack of collecting systems and pipelines needed to move it to market, said Lynn Helms, director of the state Department of Mineral Resources.

"Although natural gas creates much less revenue than oil, there is still a lot of value there," Helms said. "We don't want to see it go up in smoke."

Helms said "tens of millions of dollars" of natural gas pipelines are being planned for North Dakota, and capacity is being increased at three of the nine processing plants in the state. But it may take up to three years for the infrastructure to be built to process and ship natural gas from wells where it's now being flared, he said.

Flaring natural gas also creates carbon dioxide emissions blamed for global warming.

"This is a waste of a natural resource and it's completely unacceptable," said Wayde Schafer, a North Dakota spokesman for the Sierra Club. "We're getting the pollution without getting the energy."

Less than 1 percent of natural gas is flared from oil fields nationwide, and less than 3 percent worldwide, said Amy Sweeney, a statistician for the Energy Information Administration in Washington, D.C.

North Dakota flaring nearly a third of its natural gas "obviously is an anomaly," she said.

"We are burning a commodity but we really don't have a choice because nobody wants the oil wells to stop producing," said Ron Ness, president of the North Dakota Petroleum Council, a Bismarck-based group that represents about 160 companies.

Ness said the oil boom, led by the Bakken shale formation in western North Dakota, also spurred record natural gas production that was more than the pipeline infrastructure could handle, he said.

"Oil production increased 73 percent last year so there was no way around it," Ness said. "Nobody wants to burn a valuable resource."

North Dakota homes used about 11.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas in 2008, Sweeney said. Industry consumes about two-thirds of natural gas in the state, she said.

Terry O'Clair, the state Health Department's air quality director, said the flare emissions in the state's oil patch are within acceptable air quality guidelines.

Pecan Pipeline North Dakota Inc., a subsidiary of EOG Resources Inc. of Houston, is building a \$45 million pipeline that would transport natural gas about 75 miles from Palermo to Towner, where it would hook up with the Alliance pipeline that runs from western Canada to Chicago.

Justin Kringstad, director of the state Pipeline Authority, said the Prairie Rose Pipeline slated to be completed this fall could move about 80 million cubic feet of natural gas daily.

And Bismarck-based Williston Basin Interstate Pipeline Co., a unit of MDU Resources Group Inc., announced last year that it is planning a 100-mile-long pipeline to carry natural gas from the Bakken shale formation. The pipeline would cost between \$50 million and \$75 million and would initially carry 100 million cubic feet of natural gas daily.

But spokesman Mark Hanson said the project is hampered by a glut in the natural gas market, an ailing economy and low energy demand. Natural gas is fetching just over \$3 per 1,000 cubic feet, down from more than \$10 a year ago.

"We're still exploring demand and potential customers," Hanson said. "We need customers for the gas to go to."

Groups Draw Lines in HOT Lanes Suit

By Ashley Halsey III, Staff Writer

Washington Post, Friday, August 21, 2009

Arlington County's federal lawsuit against proposed high-speed HOT lanes on interstates 95 and 395 drew praise Thursday from the Sierra Club and condemnation from AAA.

The suit, filed Wednesday, asks the court to order an environmental review to determine whether creating three high-occupancy toll lanes down the center of those highways would increase air pollution. The suit, which does not affect the Capital Beltway HOT lane construction, also contends that the project would result in congestion on streets that carry traffic to and from the interstates.

"It is particularly important that the Arlington lawsuit also focuses on the air quality impact of the HOT lane project and the increased number of vehicles adding pollution to nearby neighborhoods," Ana Prados of the Virginia chapter of the Sierra Club said in a statement.

Lon Anderson, director of public and government affairs for AAA Mid-Atlantic, said the lawsuit was "disappointing, damaging and hypocritical."

"Virginia officials had already announced a delay to address local concerns and funding issues," Anderson said. "Does Arlington not think that having 100,000 vehicles or more barely moving for miles every morning and evening has no bad environmental impact on its environment and citizens?"

The lawsuit is "another example of a local government in Northern Virginia acting to impede a project of major regional importance," said Robert Chase, executive director of the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance, a business-funded group that lobbies for transportation improvements.

The HOT lane projects for the Beltway and I-395/95 are a public-private partnership between the state and a consortium called Fluor-Transurban. On Monday, the state announced that the start of the I-395/95 portion, which would stretch from Massaponax in Spotsylvania County north to the Pentagon, would be delayed because of community concerns and the prospect that Fluor-Transurban would have trouble raising money in sagging financial markets.

Chase said the lawsuit "further discourages consortiums with private capital from entering into business in Virginia."

The objectives of the lawsuit were welcomed by Stewart Schwartz, executive director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

"We have long argued that [the Virginia Department of Transportation] didn't consider the additional traffic entering and exiting neighborhoods and the increased traffic at the already bottlenecked 14th Street bridge," said Schwartz, who advocates increased bus and rail service and carpooling to relieve congestion. "They have failed to focus on what would move the most people, rather than simply moving more cars and adding to traffic."

Shirley Highway, which begins in Washington as I-395 and becomes I-95 in Springfield, is one of the most congested routes in the region, with traffic often slowing to less than 20 mph even during off-peak hours.

HOT lanes are free to carpool and buses, but drivers who don't meet vehicle-occupancy requirements would pay tolls. Drivers could also still use the free non-HOT lanes.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, Aug. 20, 2009:](#)

Air district's budget grows 280%

By Mark Grossi

Over the last five years, the budget for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has grown more than 280%, according to an independent study discussed today at the district's board meeting.

But the district's spending is among the most efficient of any similar district in the state, said Bill Sylte of the Sierra Nevada Air Quality Group. A summary of the report can be found [here](#).

His report on the district's finances portrayed a thrifty, progressively managed organization that stacks up well against air management districts in Los Angeles, the Bay Area, Sacramento and Ventura County.

The \$50,000 study was paid for by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The study was prompted several years ago by critics who questioned the district's use of a growing budget.

The budget has grown as the Valley has attracted more grants and government funding for its nationally known air quality problem. The air district's budget stands at \$137 million, compared to \$167.9 million for the Bay Area and \$229.2 million for South Coast.

The Valley district spends about \$34.5 million annually on staff and operating costs, employing 310 employees. South Coast, by comparison, spends four times as much on those costs and has 839 employees.

The study was done for the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, a partnership of more than 70 community, medical, public health, environmental and environmental justice groups in the Valley. Kathryn Phillips of the Environmental Defense Fund, served as the project manager for the review.