



BASS LAKE BULLETIN

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The Voice of the Bass Lake Community

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www.basslakeaction.org


Recent Wreck at Bass Lake Curve - An unidentified southbound motorist evidently lost control of his car last month when attempting to negotiate the sharp turn in Bass Lake Road near Madera. Persons who sustained injuries were taken away by ambulance.



THE LAST OF THE EL DORADO HILLS BUFFALO

Those of us who live along Bass Lake Road have become accustomed to seeing the buffalo grazing at the El Dorado Hills Ranch at the top of the Bass Lake Grade. More than once, we have seen cars slow, and passengers crane their necks to try and get a glimpse of the large animals.

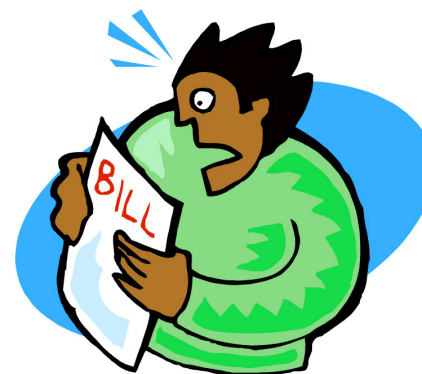
Alas, like the Native American, we have seen “the last of the buffalo.” They have gone to live on a ranch in Lake of the Pines in Nevada County, California. After 40 years, “Buffalo Will” Neunam gave up his herd in

December. The problem, said Neunam, is that the grass on the other side of the fence looked greener when they were hungry. The beasts could push through his field fencing at any time, and did so on several occasions over the years, thankfully never getting onto the freeway.

To keep his buffalo from roaming, Neunam spoiled them with generous portions of hay — two bales per day on average — and special treats, loaves of stale bread donated by the Food Bank. When the price of hay rose to \$22 per bale, Neunam said he knew it was time. He and his wife Marlyn live on a fixed income, too much of which was going toward the care and feeding of bison.

In 2010 friends of the buffalo threw a “buffalo benefit” for Neunam that helped pay the feed bill for a while. He tried to find buffalo sponsors over the years, but nothing ever worked out long term. “We’re not destitute or anything like that,” he said. “I just had to be realistic. If something happened to me I couldn’t expect my wife to take care of these guys.”

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EID PROPOSED RATE HIKES TOP WATER USERS CONCERNS

El Dorado Irrigation District (EID), the water and sewer provider for much of El Dorado County including El Dorado Hills, is proposing an additional rate structure which will raise rates over the next five years. EID set a five year rate increase in 2010, but the current proposal will supersede those rate increases with a new schedule of increases. Some customers assert that the proposed new EID rate increases are excessive .

2010 Rate Increase Kicks In

Readers will recall that in 2010 EID managed to get approval for rate increases over a five-year period after a contentious Proposition 218 process. That previously approved 5% rate increase for 2012 for water, sewer, and recycled water went into effect on January 1, 2012. Some customers will see a prorated amount on their current bill if their billing period includes January 1.

Sewer Rates Set for 2012

EID Board of Directors voted unanimously to use the lower of the last two years—either 2011 or 2012—of winter water usage to set a customer’s 2012 sewer commodity rate. Recycled water users are not affected. This one-time rate break, initiated by George Wheeldon, Division 4, has been made due to the unusually dry winter so far. Readers will recall that residential sewer rates are calculated every year, based on

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EID RATE HIKE *(continued)*

water usage roughly between November and February of each year, under the assumption that little outside irrigation occurs during the winter months. During last year's wet winter, this assumption was definitely true. But in this year's dry winter weather, many District customers, especially those in the lower elevations, have felt it necessary to irrigate, and some weather-based irrigation controllers are calling for water for some plant types. For new customers, an alternate method is being used. EID customers may contact customer service at 530-642-4000 if they have questions.

Proposed New 2012 Rate Structure

As part of its rate increase in 2010, EID committed to preparing a Cost of Services (COS) study to determine if EID's rates complied with Proposition 218. Proposition 218 requires that the rate paid for water, wastewater, and recycled water services corresponds to the cost associated with each type of service, and also that the customers within each rate category pay their fair share of the total costs.

The proposed new rates are generally understood to bring EID into compliance with Proposition 218, and to try to insure that customers all pay their fair share of cost of the service. Based on the findings in the COS study, there are three reasons for the proposed changes and increases in rates: to change the proportion of rate revenues collected from fixed fees versus variable usage charges; to collect sufficient rate revenues to match EID's operating costs and meet debt service obligations; and to ensure that each category of ratepayers is paying its fair share of the costs of providing service.

The proposed 2012 increases for the average consumption for Single Family Residential customers with medium-volume use are as follows: water and wastewater—\$2.38 per month increase; water/ wastewater/ recycled (dual-plumbed)—\$1.55 per month decrease; wastewater—\$3.70 per month decrease; water—\$6.08 per month increase. A calculator is available to let you see what your actual 2012 cost would be, but not for subsequent years.

Citizens Group Protests New Rates

Citizens group FixEID claims that the EID "trivializes the new water rate hikes included in its Proposition 218 Notice as just a few dollars", according to FixEID spokesman Greg Prada. "But they do a great job hiding that the Proposition 218 Notice includes a 15 percent increase for the average water user in 2012 (counting the 5 percent increase just

implemented in January), plus 11 percent in 2013, plus 11 percent in 2014, plus 5 percent in 2015."

According to Prada, "Altogether this is a 49 percent compounded rate increase included in a Prop 218 notice that EID tries to portray as a minor rate increase." By FixEID's calculations, "When you add these four more rate hikes to EID's 35.7 percent water increase in 2010-2011, EID water that cost the average residential ratepayer \$401 in March 2010 (for .60 acre feet usage), becomes water that will cost you \$810 in January 2015; a 'whopping' 102 percent increase. In addition, EID gets property tax revenues that effectively add another \$146 to what the average residential ratepayer is paying for EID water."

FixEID also asserts that "EID refuses to cut overhead costs that have surged more than \$10 million since 2002." Readers may see what else FixEID has to say at their website Fixeid.org.

How To Protest The Proposed New Rates

Pursuant to Proposition 218, the owner of any parcel that is subject to the proposed rates can protest against them by delivering a signed, written protest to EID on or prior to Monday, March 26, 2012. In rentals where the tenant pays the EID bill, the property owner is responsible for supplying the tenant with this notice. Tenants who pay the EID bill can submit a written protest.

EID will also receive written protests at the public hearing, which will be held on Monday, March 26, 2012, at 6:00 p.m. at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive, Cameron Park. If a majority of affected parcel owners submit written protests, the proposed rates will not go into effect.

The written protest must include your name and a description of the parcel(s) in which you have an ownership interest. A street address and/or assessor's parcel number are sufficient descriptions. If the party signing the protest is not shown as the parcel owner on the last equalized assessment roll of El Dorado County, the protest must contain, or be accompanied by, written evidence that such party is the owner. A downloadable protest form is available at basslakeaction.org. Written protests should be mailed or hand-delivered to: Clerk of the Board, El Dorado Irrigation District, 2890 Mosquito Road, Placerville, CA 95667. ~



BUFFALO *(continued)*

Though we call them buffalo, the animals are in reality American bison (*Bison bison*); though both names, "bison" and "buffalo," have a similar meaning, and the terms are interchangeable. Regardless of what one calls them, they once roamed the grasslands of North America in massive herds. Their range once roughly comprised a triangle between the Great Bear Lake in Canada's far northwest, south to the Mexican states of Durango and Nuevo León, and east along the western boundary of the Appalachian Mountains. Because of commercial hunting and slaughter in the 19th century, the bison nearly went extinct and is today restricted to a few national parks and other reserves.

The American bison is often used in North America in official seals, flags, and logos. In the United States, the American bison is a popular symbol in the Great Plains states. Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming have adopted the animal as their official state mammal, and many sports teams have chosen the bison as their mascot. In Canada, the bison is the official animal of the province of Manitoba and appears on the Manitoba flag. It is also used in the official coat of arms of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Several American coins feature the bison, most famously on the reverse side of the "buffalo nickel" from 1913 to 1938. ~

[Credits to Mike Roberts, Village Life]



COUNTY LOSES SUIT TO OAK TREE FANS

The El Dorado County Oak Woodland Management Plan, as approved by the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, offered two options for protecting county oak woodlands when building occurred in the woodlands. One option allows developers of more than 10 acres to remove only a certain portion of trees on site, requires on-site mitigation of removed oaks, and involves replanting and monitoring new and existing trees. A second option allowed developers to remove trees if they paid a mitigation fee of

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Map showing location of proposed Green Valley Center

TRAFFIC STUDY FOR PROPOSED GREEN VALLEY-FRANCISCO RETAIL PROJECT FAULTED

The county has been asked to rezone the lots on the southwest corner of Green Valley Road and Francisco Drive, diagonally across from the Safeway Shopping Center, to allow a retail shopping center to be built there. The property was originally designated as high density residential, but earlier plans to put cluster homes on the property fell afoul of design requirements and problems with the topography. Current plans call for a drug store and other retail stores.

The Bulletin has learned that individuals familiar with the proposed retail project may have uncovered defects in the traffic study done for the project.

Traffic impact studies are an important tool in the overall development planning process

They provide the necessary information to allow an assessment of the potential traffic impacts associated with proposed projects as they relate to transportation policies established by the County. Traffic impact studies are also used to identify appropriate mitigation and/or recommendations where practicable to offset project impacts.

A traffic study is required when a proposed development project has a potential to create a significant transportation-related environmental impact or a detriment to public safety. A traffic study identifies potentially significant traffic impacts, possible mitigation measures for those impacts, and evaluates any changes to the circulation network proposed by a development. A study also evaluates how the project will affect traffic

operations, in context of site design, driveway locations, turn movements permitted to and from the project site, locations of nearby traffic signals, and potential to create unsafe traffic conditions.

Traffic study results are also used to identify and assist in the design of specific transportation improvements like roadway and intersection design required with a project. These improvement requirements are incorporated into the conditions of project approval.

In the case of the Green Valley Center project, people familiar with the project believe there is a problem with the project traffic study in that it uses traffic data which takes into account only approved projects for the traffic projections. Omitting future growth leads to a much lower projected traffic count, which does not reflect future traffic loads. If a more realistic traffic count were used for the Green Valley Road area, a case could be made that the traffic mitigation measures proposed in the present study will fail to mitigate the current project's traffic impacts.

Other individuals have expressed concern about traffic safety improvements that were not addressed in the study, and point to what they say is a flawed circulation plan (how traffic will flow). The circulation plan as presented is likely to put burdens on traffic at nearby intersections that the County should have improved so as to accommodate additional growth and traffic impacts long ago, they say.

Nearby neighbors are also upset at plans to make the intersection zoned totally for commercial use. they complain that by changing the zoning to commercial retail the resulting noise and traffic will destroy the rural feeling of their neighborhood specifically, and El Dorado Hills generally. They also complain that there is no way for them to electronically access the county paperwork and records for the project to see how it might otherwise affect them. ~

OAK TREES *(continued)*

forty percent of the value of the land under the oak canopies that were to be removed.

In 2008, conservation and smart growth groups, including Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation, El Dorado County Taxpayers for Quality Growth, and the California Oak Foundation, brought a lawsuit in Superior Court challenging the validity of the Oak Woodland Management Plan. Opponents claimed the oak management plan would result in a decimation of oak woodland habitat and wildlife corridors in the county. The suit claimed that the county's plan violated California's Environmental Quality Act, as well as the county's 2004 General Plan. El Dorado Superior County Judge Suzanne N. Kingsbury denied the petition in February 2010, but the Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation appealed.

Last month a three-judge panel of the State's Third District Court of Appeal overruled the Superior Court's decision and rejected the county's oak woodland protection plan. Rejection of the county's plan eliminates the ability for developers to utilize the option which permits clearing of oaks in exchange for payment of a mitigation fee. Instead, developers will be limited in the amount of oak woodlands they can remove on a parcel.

The Board set the mitigation fee amount based on the costs of conserving these remote parcels, rather than the more expensive parcels along Highway 50, according to the conservationists. The group contended that the Board's adopted plan would have created more fragmentation of oak woodland habitat and limited the ability of wildlife to move. In addition, they say, the county used a formula using tree canopy alone for measuring oak woodlands, rather than including the space between trees, thus significantly decreasing total oak woodland habitat to be protected.

It remains to be seen as to how and whether the ruling, which has gone back to Judge Kingsbury for disposition, will affect builders and developers. ~



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Hello Everyone,

Can it be February already? It seems like it was just New Years. How time does fly.

Perhaps time is going by quickly for me because I have been busy learning upgrades of the software programs on my new computer. In addition to moving to a 2011 Intel-based Mac, I managed to jump three versions of my operating systems, all in one leap. I think that's what one calls techno-shock.

Of course, by leaping forward system-wise, I left most of my application software behind. Installing and learning the latest versions of Office and other software, like the Adobe InDesign with which I produce the Bulletin, was indeed an adventure.

This month's Bulletin has some long articles, long because the subjects are somewhat complex, and cannot be



In Memory of A Happy Day
in February

Was it the smile of early spring
That made my bosom glow?
'Twas sweet, but neither sun nor wind
Could raise my spirit so.

Was it some feeling of delight,
All vague and undefined?
No, 'twas a rapture deep and strong,
Expanding in the mind!

- Anne Bronte

described in one paragraph. I hope we are informative this month. You can get even more information by following the links in the articles.

Sincerely,

John Thomson

President



PROPANE PRICES CONTINUE TO DRIFT LOWER

Wholesale propane prices continued to drift downward and are somewhat lower than this time last year. The February 12 wholesale price at Benicia was \$1.56 per gallon. The benchmark Mont Belvieu, Texas wholesale price on that same date was \$1.20 per gallon. Last year the Mont Belvieu wholesale price was \$1.31 per gallon.

The February 12 delivered price to JS West contract price customers in Woodridge, Bridlewood Canyon and Sierra Crossing was \$2.12 (1.56 + .06 transportation + .50 markup) per gallon. Last year at this time the JS West total contract price was in the \$2.31 per gallon range.

Bridlewood Canyon, Sierra Crossing and Woodridge residents can call Bette Easton at JS West, 530-642-7001, for information on how to switch to JS West and obtain the contract price. ~



BLAC SETS MARCH, APRIL 2012 BOARD MEETING DATES

The March BLAC Board meeting will be held at the home of Tom and Andi Stuchell, 2206 Summer Drive (Woodridge), El Dorado Hills, on March 5, 2012, at 7:00 PM. No speaker is scheduled.

The April BLAC Board meeting will be held at the home of Fran and John Thomson, 501 Kirkwood Court (Woodridge), El Dorado Hills, on April 2, 2012, at 7:00 PM. No speaker is scheduled.

All BLAC members are cordially invited to attend all BLAC meetings. For further information regarding our meetings, please contact John Thomson, 530-677-3039. ~

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