



BASS LAKE BULLETIN

Vol. X No. 9

The Voice of the Bass Lake Community

September 2012

www.basslakeaction.org



UNCERTAINTY CLOUDS NEW RURAL FIRE FEE

Bass Lake residents, like many other California homeowners, are understandably confused and upset about the new rural fire fee (in essence a tax) on almost every habitable structure (residence) located in a rural area. Lots with two residences will pay two fees. Those El Dorado County residents whose homes have been deemed to be taxable will be getting their annual fire fee tax bills in the mail beginning the first week of September, according to El Dorado County Assessor Karl Weiland.

The fee, which has been mischaracterized by many to be a fee for fire *protection*, is actually for fire *prevention*. According to the State Board of Equalization, the fee will fund a variety of fire prevention services, including brush clearance and activities to improve forest health to better withstand wildfires. Other activities funded by the fee include: fire break construction, defensible space inspection, fire prevention engineering, emergency evacuation planning, fire prevention education, fire hazard severity mapping, fire related law enforcement, and implementation of the State Fire Plan. None of the funds collected by the fire fee will be used for fire protection, such as fire engines or firemen.

The tax applies to any residence located in what is called the State Responsibility Area (SRA). The SRA is the area of the state where the State of California is financially responsible for the prevention and suppression of wildfires. A SRA does not include lands within city boundaries or in Federal Responsibility Areas (FRAs).

The tax does not apply to residences located in what is called a Local Responsibility Area (LRA). LRAs include incorporated cities, cultivated agriculture lands, and portions of the desert. LRA fire protection is typically provided by city fire departments, fire protection districts, counties, and by CALFIRE under contract to local government. The maps that defined what areas are SLA and what areas are LRA were adopted by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection in January 2011, and were updated to reflect automatic changes as of July 1, 2011.

The fee is \$150 a year for residences in a SRA without any local fire protection such as a local fire department or a contractual protection agreement with CALFIRE. For residences in a SRA with local fire protection, such as a local fire department or a contractual protection agreement with Cal Fire, the fee is reduced to \$115. Residences in a LRA or a FRA pay nothing.

El Dorado Hills, which is generally defined as the residences within the service boundary of the El Dorado Hills Fire Department, has residences in both the SRA and an LRA, as defined by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection. Residences in the SRA portions of El Dorado Hills that are served by the El Dorado Hills Fire Department (EDHFD) will pay the reduced fee of \$115 by virtue of them being served by the EDHFD. Residences that are in the LRA, also served by the EDHFD, will pay nothing.

An interactive map that will allow one to determine if one's residence is within the SRA has been provided by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, and may be found at bof.fire.ca.gov/sra_viewer/. ~

ASSESSOR SAYS NEW FIRE FEE BILLS TO ARRIVE IN SEPTEMBER

El Dorado County Assessor Karl Weiland has announced that California fire fee bills are due to be mailed to El Dorado County property owners starting the first week of September. Below is some useful information to help you understand and deal with

this new fee.

First, be sure to check your fire fee bill for accuracy. If you were not the owner of the property on July 1, 2011, file a protest (see below) and submit copies of the closing statement or grant deed as documentation. If your property is located in the city of Placerville or the city of South Lake Tahoe and you receive a bill, file a protest and attach a copy of your property tax bill as documentation; highlight the TRA field on your bill (property in the city of Placerville TRAs start with 001, South Lake Tahoe with 002). If your property is located in a Federal Responsibility Area (FRA) and you receive a bill, file a protest and attach a copy of your lease.

Second, if the number of habitable structures on the bill is wrong, you may file a protest and explain why the number is wrong. That information on the bill came from the assessor's records. You can check the total units that are shown as being on your parcel by accessing the assessor's on-line property information on the El Dorado County website, using your property's Assessor's Parcel Number. If your property record needs correcting, you will have to contact the assessor.

Third, if your property is located within the boundary of a local agency that provides fire protection and you do not get the \$35 discount, you can access the assessor's on-line property information on the county website, using your property's Assessor's Parcel Number, to look for a fire protection district listed with your property. If one is listed, file a protest and submit the assessor's property information as documentation. If no fire protection district is listed, contact the fire district or fire department you believe provides protection and obtain the documentation to submit with your protest. If you are served by El Dorado Hills Fire Department you will have to contact the fire department at 916-933-6623, because the EDHFD is not listed as your fire protection district on your property record.

Fourth, if you wish to protest the bill, do not mail your protest in with your payment;

(continued on page 2)

ASSESSOR *(continued)*

send the protest in separately. Make sure you follow the directions for each item. You are supposed to get a response to your protest within 60 days. Note that if your protest is denied and you have not paid the bill, penalties could be applied.

Finally, if your bill is accurate, it must be paid within 30 days from the notice date, or a 20 percent penalty and interest will accrue. You may want to write "Paid Under Protest" on the face of the bill and on the check, as this may be important if the courts order refunds. It may also make you feel better to have made a statement. Be sure to make copies for your records.

The official Cal Fire Website for obtaining a protest form and other information is: firepreventionfee.org. The protest website sponsored by State Board of Equalization member George Runner is: calfirefee.com.

If you do not have access to the Internet, the El Dorado County Assessor will be glad to help you. The main office is located at 360 Fair Lane in Placerville, office hours are 8-5 M-F, and the phone is 530-621-5719. The South Lake Tahoe office is at 3368 Lake Tahoe Blvd., Suite 103, and the phone is 530-573-3422. ~

EDH FIRE DEPARTMENT, EDC SUPERVISORS, FIRE OFFICIALS OPPOSE FIRE FEE

In a news release dated August 21, 2012, Fire Chief Dave Roberts announced that the El Dorado Hills Fire Department (EDHFD) opposes the new State Responsibility Area (SRA) fees imposed on EDHFD constituents, and complains that the state is levying an additional cost without providing additional services. The release goes on to say that SRA fees mandate that many homeowners living in forested or wildfire-prone areas pay an annual fee of \$150 to the State of California for fire-prevention services.

"The Fire Districts Association of California, the El Dorado County Fire Chief's Association, The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and the El Dorado Hills Fire Department have actively opposed the bill on behalf of its fire district members since the idea was presented a few years ago as a way to generate additional revenues for the state," Roberts said.

"El Dorado Hills has homes located in these State Responsibility Areas (SRAs), which are designated zones that are already primarily protected by El Dorado Hills Fire

Department. These homeowners already pay local taxes for year-round fire prevention and protection services. It is the position of El Dorado Hills Fire Department that this annual \$150 SRA fee is onerous to the residents who will not see any direct benefit from California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE), the state's wildland firefighting agency. Local fire districts will not receive any of the estimated \$125 million collected as the state struggles to fill its budget gaps," Robert continued.

In conclusion, Roberts said, "El Dorado Hills Fire Department did not support this legislation nor believe that this fee should be imposed on its residents. California's Master Mutual Aid System, which is a model for the rest of the nation, has for decades inspired collaboration between local fire agencies and the state and will be jeopardized by these fees. Local fire agencies are concerned that with the implementation of the SRA fees, any future measures supporting local fire protection, prevention and paramedic services will simply not be approved by voters on top of the SRA fee charged by the state, putting the local agency and its constituents at risk. If it is the will of the State Legislature to reduce the burden on the State's General Fund for CALFIRE costs, an alternative and more equitable mechanism is necessary." ~



TAXPAYER ASSOCIATION OBJECTS TO FIRE TAX

The Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association (HJTA) has filed an official objection and recommendation letter to the Office of Administrative Law and the State Board of Forestry regarding emergency regulations to implement a new fire tax approved by the Legislature in June.

The objection centers on two key points: the fire levy is a tax and not a fee; and as a tax, it failed to receive a two-thirds vote in the Legislature under provisions of Proposition 13. The letter asserts that because it undermines the constitutionality of the statute, any proposed regulation to implement it should also be denied.

"This letter underscores what has been our course of action since this illegal tax was approved in June. We will pursue every legal remedy at our disposal in order to expose this budget charade that unfairly targets thousands of hardworking rural taxpayers," said HJTA President Jon Coupal.

HJTA continues to lead the fight in efforts to oppose this tax and, with the filing of this letter, continues its commitment to ultimately have the tax declared illegal.

"California homeowners, some of whom are unemployed and facing foreclosure, will be bearing the brunt of this \$150 annual unconstitutional tax. Defending them and Proposition 13 remains our top priority," said Coupal.

Persons familiar with the matter have said that HJTA intends to file a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the fee as soon as the fee bills are sent out. ~



GREEN VALLEY EQUESTRIAN CENTER PROJECT DELAYED

The planned equestrian center on Green Valley Road and Deer Valley Road in the Rescue area was put on hold by the county Planning Commission, as local residents voiced concerns over the project and the developer requested more time to address their concerns. The planning commission will take up the project at a future date. A map of the proposed project may be seen by clicking [here](#).

The developer of the equestrian facility, Dennis Graham, had asked the Planning Commission to rezone 46 of the 146 acre site from RE-5/RE-10 to Recreational Facilities and to grant him a special use permit to establish an equestrian facility on the property. The zoning on the other 100 acres would remain unchanged. The equestrian center, when built out, would include two covered arenas, stall barns for 420 horses, five fenced riding areas, an equestrian retail store with an office and clubhouse, guest cottages, and camping for horse trailers during events. The facility would host special events with up to 250 spectators. A 32 square-foot lighted monument sign would identify the business.

Many residents in the area voiced objections to the project at the planning commission meeting. One of the concerns was that naturally occurring asbestos in the ground would become airborne during the initial grading and during facility operations. Traffic congestion, odors, noise, and unnecessary

(continued on page 3)

EQUESTRIAN *(continued)*

tree removal were also mentioned.

Faced with a lengthy list of issues, the commission voted to continue the item off calendar until all of the adverse impacts brought up by residents can be addressed.

In the meantime, BLAC has been told that a meeting to discuss the planned development will be held on Thursday, September 13 at 6:30 P.M. at the El Dorado Hills Fire Station on Wilson Way. Dennis Graham and his engineer will be at the meeting. All BLAC members are invited to this meeting, which is for all those who are affected by the development and those who are interested in learning more about the sizable project and what the possible impacts will be. ~



SPEC HOMES ARE BACK AS BUILDERS GAIN CONFIDENCE

Builders seek more permits in an effort to get ahead of demand

Homebuilders are pulling permits faster than they sell homes as they gain confidence in the market and gingerly begin rebuilding supply, according to a recent article by Sanford Nax in the *Sacramento Business Journal*. Nax covers real estate, planning, development, construction and economic issues for the *Journal*.

For years, builders would not pull permits until they had buyers under contract. That is changing as some developers, worried about having enough inventory, begin to build houses with the expectation they will sell quickly, says Nax.

Nax quotes John Orr, president and CEO of the Sacramento-based North State Building Industry Association as saying that there is more confidence in the new-home buying economy.

That confidence has limits, however; builders don't want to get too far ahead of their customers, fearing a repeat of 2010 when a sales surge collapsed after favorable tax credits expired.

"You won't see 50 to 60 houses under construction, but they might have five to seven to 10," Nax quotes Orr as saying.

The growing confidence is reflected in building permit figures. Builders took out 739 single-family home construction permits in the Sacramento metro region in the second quarter. That number exceeded sales by 58 percent, according to Hanley Wood Market Intelligence. The gap was just 20.5 percent in the first quarter.

Home buyers frustrated by the short supply of existing houses for sale are helping fuel demand. Instead of competing for existing homes, they are turning to new-home subdivisions, so it's beneficial for builders to have houses ready for occupancy, said Scott Hoisington, regional president of Woodside Homes Northern California.

He keeps a 30-day supply of homes—which is about four houses at the current pace of sales.

The New Home Co., which three weeks ago opened The Trails, a 79-lot neighborhood with new models in the Parkway master planned community in Folsom, will now start a phase if only one lot of the phase remains unsold. In the recent past, all the lots in a phase had to be sold to justify construction, said Kevin Carson, president of the Northern California division.

Eleven homes have been sold at The Trails in those three weeks, and total sales in the division through August are double the tally for all of 2011. Carson attributes that to strong demand and an emerging spillover from the Bay Area.

Builders also are raising prices, and are looking for finished lots and land to buy. The median price of new homes increased 6 percent in the second quarter from the same period in 2011. That followed a 3 percent year-over-year gain in the first quarter. Those were the first price hikes since third quarter 2010, according to Hanley Wood.

But prices haven't increased enough for all builders to go through the expense of purchasing land and getting entitlements. So they look for finished lots or nearly finished lots. Those are in increasingly short supply, especially in Manteca and Tracy, which are becoming moderate priced alternatives to the overheated Bay Area housing market.

Manteca only has about 400 finished lots left, Hoisington said. The supply near Tracy is so low the sale of some finished lots in

Mountain House sparked a bidding war among 12 would-be purchasers, including Woodside. A public builder was the victor, Hoisington said.

The New Home Co., for one, is willing to spend the time and money to develop lots. The builder, formed in 2009, recently opened a land acquisition division that is looking for property throughout the state. One notable deal is in Davis, where it is processing 98 acres. Carson said site work should begin in summer 2013 on a 500-lot community.

Still, caution abounds. Activity is up, but it is significantly less than the boom years. Hoisington notes that lumber demand, while double from last year, is 20 percent of what it was five years ago.

"Things are definitely headed in the right direction," said Jonathan Dienhart, director of published research for Hanley Wood. "But it is not realistic to expect an explosive housing recovery," according to Nax. ~



REMEMBER—FALL SPRINKLER SETTINGS

During the transition months of fall, be sure to reduce sprinkler run times and turn off your irrigation controller if it rains. As the days shorten and the nights become longer and cooler, plants require less moisture from irrigation systems. Installing a "smart" weather-based irrigation controller can take the guess work out of programming by sensing air temperature, humidity, solar rays, and rainfall to determine soil moisture in order to water with the weather. To learn more go to www.eid.org. ~





PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Hello Everyone,

Management guru Peter Drucker always said that if you want to predict the future, just go to the window and observe what is going on. Taking a page from his book, I have been doing just that: I have developed what I call the Bobcat Index.

You may recall that Bobcat loaders are quite popular in the construction industry. They are relatively compact and versatile pieces of machinery, used to scoop soil, rubble and other materials. When a loader's bucket contains material, it can be lifted and deposited into a truck or simply



September

The breezes taste
Of apple peel.
The air is full
Of smells to feel—
Ripe fruit, old footballs,
Burning brush,
New books, erasers,
Chalk, and such.
The bee, his hive,
Well-honeyed hum,
And Mother cuts
Chrysanthemums.
Like plates washed clean
With suds, the days
Are polished with
A morning haze.

—John Updike

moved to another location

Our house backs onto Bass Lake Road, and as we sit on our back patio we can see the road and the traffic. Six years ago, we could see that the road was thronged with dump trucks, construction vehicles, and always a number of trailers carrying Bobcats. Then I stopped seeing them, obviously victims of the housing bust and the consequent economic slump.

So I had not seen a Bobcat being trailered along Bass Lake Road for years, as the economic slump continued and construction was moribund. But as I have sat on our patio over the last few weeks, I have seen four or five Bobcats being towed behind what look to be construction trucks. I have also seen a number of dump trucks. What is going on? The Bobcat Index is going up.

Now no one will dispute that nationally and across California the economy is terrible. The policies of the Federal and California governments are beyond the scope of my letter, but I don't think they are helping much, just running up debts (like high speed trains to nowhere).

But I contend that the frequency of Bobcat sightings along Bass Lake road indicate a nascent recovery in El Dorado Hills. After all, this is the place people want to live, so we should begin to recover first. Let's hope my Bobcat Index indicator proves right and we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel.

Sincerely,

John Thomson

President



BLAC SETS SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER BOARD MEETING DATES

The September BLAC Board meeting will be held September 10, 2012, at 7:00 PM at the home of Jeanette and Joe D'Amico, 400 Basil Court (Woodridge), El Dorado Hills. The October general meeting and CSD candidates' night will be held on October 1. The November Board meeting will be held on November 5. In addition, the BLAC Annual Christmas Party will be held on December 3rd.

All BLAC members are cordially invited to attend all meetings. For further information regarding our meetings, please contact Vice President Kathy Prevost, 530-672-6836. ~

The Bass Lake Bulletin is published monthly seven to ten days after the regular monthly BLAC meeting, by the Bass Lake Action Committee, El Dorado Hills, California Copyright © 2012. Permission to reproduce unabridged articles is granted if appropriate attribution is given to the Bass Lake Bulletin

John E. Thomson, Ph.D.
President and Editor
doctorjet@basslakeaction.org
530-677-3039

For additional information
see our website, basslakeaction.org
or contact

Vice President Kathy Prevost
kathyp@basslakeaction.org
530-672-6836

Bass Lake Action Committee
501 Kirkwood Court
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762