State Air Resources Board will include El Dorado, Placer counties

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

The Sacramento region will get a seat on the California Air Resources Board under legislation signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown this week.

Assembly Bill 146 will expand the ARB from 11 to 12 members, with the new seat reserved for a representative from the Sacramento, Placer, Yolo-Solano, El Dorado or Feather River air districts.

Sacramento Democratic Assemblyman Roger Dickinson, who proposed AB146, noted that the Sacramento region had been the largest major metropolitan area in California not assured a seat on the state air board.

Key duties of the Air Resources Board include controlling vehicle emissions and reducing greenhouse gas emissions as required under landmark legislation passed in 2006.

As part of that mission, the board is about to launch a controversial carbon trading market for allowances to emit greenhouse gases in California.

The Sacramento region has struggled for years to meet federal air quality standards for ozone and particulates, so the issue of representation on the ARB has been particularly acute to local officials.

All ARB members are appointed by the governor and are confirmed by the Senate. Board members serve part time, except for the chair.

Rural counties had opposed Dickinson’s bill, arguing that giving the Sacramento region an ARB seat would exacerbate an imbalance giving urban air districts far more power than rural districts on the board.

Volatile weather changing how California farmers grow food

By Mark Shapiro, California Watch

Ten miles outside of Modesto, in the farming town of Hughson just off Highway 99, the Duarte Nursery is at the front line of dramatic changes now under way in California’s immense agriculture industry.

The family-run nursery, founded in 1976, is one of the largest in the United States, and there’s a good chance the berries, nuts and citrus fruits eaten across the West began their journey to market as seedlings in Duarte’s 30 acres of greenhouses, labs and breeding stations.

The nusery’s owners have built a thriving business using state-of-the-art techniques to develop varieties adapted to the particular conditions and pests California farmers face.

These days, according to John Duarte, president of the nursery, that means breeding for elevated levels of heat and salt, which researchers say are symptoms of climate change – even if Duarte doesn’t necessarily see it that way.

“Whether it’s carbon built up in the atmosphere or just friggin’ bad luck,” he said, “the conditions are straining us.”

The cause of Duarte’s woes might be in dispute among farmers in California’s $31 billion agriculture industry. But the symptoms are clear. From the vast fields of fruits and nuts in the Central Valley to the wineries of Napa and Sonoma, the increasingly volatile weather is altering the fundamental conditions for growing food, California’s largest industry.

Farmers are in many ways at the front line of climate change. They conjure food from soil, sunlight and water – all of which are profoundly affected, scientists say, by climate change. Stresses have emerged across the state as water supplies tighten. Rain is coming at unexpected times. Winters aren’t getting cold enough. And salt from the rising ocean is making its way into Central Valley water.

Climate change already has cost farmers money. In the Central Valley, some growers are paying more for seeds designed to withstand the new extremes.

At the nurseries and colleges in what Duarte calls “the Silicon Valley of agricultural innovation,” these changing conditions have forced botanists to look for varieties of almond, pepper, citrus, cherry and other crops resistant to drought and salt.

Other interests also are bracing for dramatic change. The crop insurance industry is calculating potential billion-dollar losses from extreme weather conditions, as well as the floods and fires that occur in their wake. Climate change could join the ranks of earthquake and hurricane insurance as a special – and hugely expensive – problem for insurers.

Over the past 20 years, there has been more than $500 million in crop losses from heat waves, floods and ill-timed rainstorms in the heavily agricultural counties of San

Joaquin, Merced, Kings, Kern, Napa and Sonoma, according to a study last year by a team of Stanford University researchers.

“Compared to 20 or 30 years ago, farmers are recognizing a lot more risk factors in climate events,” said Jeff Yasui, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Risk Management Agency office in California, which handles crop insurance in the state.

Climate and agriculture scientists predicted much of this. Charles Kolstad, an environmental economist at UC Santa Barbara, said California agriculture is being hit with a trifecta of converging forces prompted by climate change: longer seasons of extreme heat, shorter cold seasons and dwindling water supplies.

Yields of key crops are expected to drop significantly over the coming decades as climate change alters these growing conditions, according to a report Kolstad co-wrote for the state Environmental Protection Agency and Energy Commission and published last fall in the peer-reviewed journal Climatic Change.

Climate scientists believe the Earth’s average temperature will rise at least 2 degrees in the next four decades — their most conservative estimate. Along the way, the yields of citrus crops in the San Joaquin Valley are expected to drop about 18 percent, grapes about 6 percent, and cherries and other orchard crops about 9 percent.

Those crops — accustomed to the cooler edges of California’s climate — are showing declining yields already, according to the USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service. That could mean higher prices for consumers as the supply shrinks. This summer’s record droughts in the Midwest also prompted the USDA to predict a similar rise in prices driven by devastated yields for corn and soybeans, the primary food for chicken and cattle nationwide.

Kolstad and other scientists have focused on tree-based perennial crops because they are fixed in 25- to 30-year cycles and cannot easily be adapted to changing conditions. Switching a tree orchard from cherries, for example, to more heat-tolerant pistachios, avocados or tangerines can cost millions of dollars before the trees start bearing marketable fruit.

If California’s water crisis persists, seasonal vegetables and fruits also will be dramatically affected. Some already are.

Much of the southern Central Valley, spreading along either side of Interstate 5, is now a patchwork of fallow fields, according to Gayle Holman with the Westlands Water District in Fresno. Thousands of acres that once grew onions, tomatoes, melons and other crops have been set aside by farmers because they can no longer obtain, or afford, water – a scarcity, scientists say, that is significantly due to the dramatic shifts in the timing of rainfalls in the state.

Those grower cutbacks are felt most acutely in Central Valley towns like Mendota, where farm workers can no longer find the seasonal fieldwork upon which they once relied. Official unemployment in the area ranges between 15 and 20 percent. Studies by the state’s Employment Development Department show an inverse correlation between water allocations and unemployment in the valley: The water supply goes down, and the unemployment rate goes up.

One problem, then another

Like just about everything having to do with climate change, the consequences unfold like a sequence of trapdoors. First, there’s the temperature, a jagged progression over the past decade of unusual highs and lows occurring at times of the year that can debilitate growing crops.

Then there’s the water. California’s water sources are caught in a pincer: More water is needed at a time when less water is being delivered into the network of canals carrying it from the north to the agricultural regions in the south.

A precipitous drop in snowfall has led to declining water runoff in the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers in the spring and summer months, when it’s central to irrigation in the valley. Over the past century, the state Department of Water Resources has measured a steady 10 percent decline in runoff from April to July. In recent years, however, the rate has accelerated to as much as 20 percent during those critical months.

For the three years between 2006 and 2009, the runoff amounted to the equivalent of two “normal” years, according to John Leahigh, chief of operations planning for the California State Water Project.

In fact, such calculations appear to be the new normal. This year, Sacramento Delta water supplies are not expected to come anywhere close to filling the irrigation needs of Central Valley farmers.

In February, the Department of Water Resources cut the delivery of water to valley farmers from 60 to 50 percent of their allotment – a practically unprecedented reduction that late in the growing season, according to Leahigh.

Parts of the valley supplied by the federal water project have been cut even more severely, to 30 percent of their normal allotment.

Farmers in the valley generally blame the drop-off in water on the 2007 state Supreme Court decision affirming the need for water to preserve Pacific smelt and other endangered species.

A study by the Public Policy Institute of California, however, concludes that the roughly 300,000 acre-feet of water diverted to comply with the Endangered Species Act constitutes no more than 15 to 20 percent of the reduced water flow to the valley.

Rather, the overall pool of water is shrinking.

“There’s less water coming into the system,” said Francis Chung, chief of the Modeling Support Branch for the Department of Water Resources. “The water that used to exist is now coming earlier in the year. So there’s less water to distribute (to the valley) during the summer.”

Rising sea levels threaten water supply

Another growing problem has been rising sea levels associated with climate change. The San Francisco Bay, according to a recent assessment by the National Academies of Sciences, is projected to rise by as much as 18 inches, and potentially triple that by the end of the century. Those inches translate into waves of new salt sources lapping into the delta.

Less water channeled into the delta from the Sierra means less available freshwater to dilute the onrush of salt, which has been pushing steadily eastward.

For each foot in sea level, 200,000 acre-feet of freshwater, known as “carriage water,” is needed to hold the line on the saltwater. That amounts to one-fifth the volume of Folsom Lake each year, according to Chung, and the diversions will only increase as the sea level rises.

A study by UC Davis estimates that if salinity continues to rise at the current rate, by 2030, the financial costs to the Central Valley could be huge: as much as $1 billion to $1.5 billion a year in decreased agricultural activity, amounting to some 27,000 to 53,000 jobs lost.

Over the next 40 years, salinity is expected to increase by 4 to 26 percent, depending on the time of year, at the two water-pumping stations outside of Tracy. From there, most of the water destined for the valley is sent southward, according to a study by the Public Policy Institute of California and the Center for Watershed Sciences at UC Davis.

Ellen Hanak, senior policy fellow at the institute, explained that inside the delta, the network of waterways helps to dilute the salt content. But in the Central Valley, she said, there's not enough freshwater to reduce the salt's impact. That's partly the result of farmers using more targeted irrigation to reduce waste; they no longer have the excess spillover to mix with the salt.

"There's no drainage," she said. "They can't get rid of it."

As freshwater supplies decrease, the decisions over how to use it are likely to become even more difficult.

"Water used to push the ocean back is water not used for agriculture," said Tara Smith, an analyst and water modeling expert for the Department of Water Resources.

In other words, the liquid barricade needed to hold back the ocean is drawn from a dwindling amount of freshwater. The reduction in allocations issued by the water board in February means that more water is necessary to hold back the advancing Pacific Ocean and push the saltwater intrusion westward.

"We're going to have to keep reducing the volume of exports from the delta because of the increased volume needed of carriage water," said Chung at the Department of Water Resources.

Nevertheless, 40 railroad cars' worth of salt — about 500,000 tons a year — flow daily out of the delta into the fields of the Central Valley. That adds extra salt to valley soils already made salty by the intensive pumping of groundwater from what millions of years ago was the ocean floor.

Daniel Cozad, executive director of the Central Valley Salinity Coalition, a group of local farmers, businessmen and government officials, said some farmers in the western valley are being forced to adapt by switching from salt-sensitive crops like strawberries and avocados to less sensitive — and less profitable — crops like alfalfa and wheat.

"Unfortunately," Cozad said, "the higher the value of the crop, the more sensitive it is to salt."

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5 South Lake Tahoe council candidates to square-off

Who should be elected to the South Lake Tahoe City Council?

The five candidates will make a case for themselves at an Oct. 1 forum sponsored by *Lake Tahoe News*, South Tahoe Association of Realtors and Lake Tahoe Lodging Association. Two positions are open.

The 11am event is at Inn by the Lake's conference center. Moderating will be Hayley Williamson and Sharon Kerrigan.

The public is encouraged to attend to find out what the candidates' views are on a variety of topics.

Lake Tahoe News is also publishing Q&A profiles of each candidate, having started on Sept. 10. They will run for five Mondays.

Opinion: Without monitoring online reviews, a business can suffer

By John S. Rizzo and V. Michael Santoro

It happens all the time: The hard-working crew at a small business loses customers thanks to the sour grapes of one person.

It could be a disgruntled employee, an angry customer or even a competitor.

Anyone can post a bad review online and hurt your business. Unfortunately, most business owners are not even aware that these bad reviews are out there.

Seventy-two percent of buyers trust reviews as much as personal recommendations, and 70 percent trust consumer opinions posted online, according to a recent Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey.

A bad review published in a newspaper, or broadcast on radio or TV, is short-lived, but a bad review posted online can live indefinitely. With consumers now researching an average of 10 reviews before making a buying decision, and 70 percent trusting a business that has a minimum of six reviews posted, business owners need to be proactive in developing their online reputation. You need several positive reviews.

Online searches have been streamlined, combining reviews with maps, pay-per-click advertising, local business directories and Facebook fan pages. As damaging as bad reviews can be, positive reviews can be equally constructive.

Here are some tips for reputation marketing:

• Develop a 5-Star Reputation: Begin by having your happy customers post great reviews about your business. Strive to have at least 10. Have each post to one of the following: Google Plus Local, Yelp, CitySearch, SuperPages, YP.com, your Facebook fan page, etc. This needs to be a continuous process. Proactively ask your customers to post reviews.

• Market Your Reputation: Once reviews are posted, use a well-designed online marketing strategy to drive targeted traffic to your website. Ensure that your website can convert this traffic into customers. Additionally, showcase these third-party reviews on your website.

• Manage Your Reputation: Regularly check that the reviews being posted are positive. You can use Google Alerts for your business name; however, you will need to check the local directories, too, since they're not picked up by Google Alerts. By building up the positive reviews, you can counter a poor one by sheer volume. You should also quickly post a reply to a negative review if they occur. Always be professional and indicate what action you have taken to remedy the situation.

• Create a Reputation Marketing Culture: Train your staff to proactively ask customers for reviews and to deal immediately with any customer who appears unhappy. A positive culture will encourage customers to post positive reviews about your business.

John S. Rizzo obtained his bachelor's in business administration and spent three years as a consultant for Amazon.com's publishing group. V. Michael Santoro has more than 10 years in the digital marketing field. His prior experience includes international senior marketing positions in technology fields.

CDC rules force county health departments to make changes

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recently provided a directive to county health departments regarding administration of immunizations. The CDC's mandate stipulates that effective Oct. 1, health departments can no longer utilize federally-provided vaccines for people who have private health insurance.

Due to these changes, the El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Division will begin a new screening process on Oct. 1 for individuals seeking immunizations.

"While we don't see a large number of private pay clients, we know this may be an adjustment for some people, and we want to make the transition as smooth as possible," Lynnan Svensson, supervising public health nurse, said in a statement.

According to Svensson, the Public Health Division will continue to provide free and low-cost immunizations, including all recommended childhood immunizations and some adult vaccines, to individuals who do not have health insurance and those who are underinsured (such as individuals whose insurance does not pay for immunizations). Public Health will also continue to offer community flu vaccination clinics at low-cost to the general public; the influenza vaccine has been exempted from the new CDC mandate.

For additional information, call (530) 573.3155 in South Lake Tahoe or (530) 621.6100 in the Placerville area.

Tahoe City visionaries talking about overhauling the town

By Kathryn Reed

TAHOE CITY – A hotel where Safeway is as well as one along the golf course. Residences above street level businesses. Side streets with commercial offerings instead of just along the highway. Expanded recreation. Improved public transit.

Those are some of the visions a group of business owners and others have for Tahoe City. Their vision was unveiled at a standing-room-only meeting of more than 80 people on Sept. 27 at Granlibakken resort.

"For me, things have changed a lot," Douglas Dale, who has owned Wolfdale's restaurant for 34 years, said. Mostly the change is in the winter. "I can barely break even, if I do. The mousetraps of Squaw Valley and Northstar have done us in."

This is one vision for a section of Tahoe City. Rendering/Design Workshop

Skiers are staying at those resorts in the winter and no longer venture into Tahoe City.

It also didn't help that when the villages opened they lured Tahoe City businesses to their locations with the promise of free rent – some for a year. Then when the rents were established they kept going up and many of those original Tahoe City businesses are nowhere to be found. But what can be found are empty storefronts in the villages and in town.

Some of the visuals that were presented on easels Thursday night portrayed a Tahoe City larger and more developed than what exists now. A connectivity, though, between the sectors, with more open space and access to Lake Tahoe were also illustrated.

One of the goals would be to tap into what is expected to be an overhaul of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan – which is expected to be adopted later this year – to allow for mixed uses and increased building height.

"What gets our dander up is high-rises on the lake. That is the difference between us and the South Shore," Mary Cushing said.

Sue Daniels, a Realtor in Tahoe City, told the group, "There is a myth in society that bigger is better. It's important to keep that in mind. Our population is much, much larger than it was in the 1960s. Yes, it's gone down since the 1980s. This has happened across the nation. We can fix this town without five stories on the lake."

She was one of several people who took issue with the speakers saying more lake access is crucial, but then said it might be for the tourists via a hotel room.

Richard Shaw, who works out of the Aspen office of Design Workshop, was at the meeting to explain some of the concepts that have been developed. (He is also the main man at Design

Workshop behind the South Shore vision process.)

He said the primary challenges facing Tahoe City are:

• Almost the whole downtown is built on a stream environmental zone;

• Decline in full-time residents;

• No hotel rooms in the prime areas where tourists want to be;

• Decline in market share;

• Small parcels have multiple owners.

Dale, along with Roger Kahn whose family ran Porters Sports for years, Brendan Madigan of Alpenglow Sports, Gary Davis of Gary Davis Engineers, Wally Auerbach of Auerbach Engineers and Steve Hoch, executive director of the Tahoe City Downtown Association, were the primary speakers during the more than two-hour high-energy gathering.

Business owners, TCDA, Tahoe City Public Utility District and North Lake Tahoe Resort Association hired Design Workshop for about $35,000 to help develop a vision for the North Shore community.

Business reps pointed to the large amount of public money spent on improving aspects of town – like Commons Beach, bike trails and other infrastructure, but admitted the private sector has not done its part to reinvest in the community.

It was said many times at the Thursday meeting how Tahoe City does not want to resemble present day South Shore, or either of the villages at Squaw or Northstar. But it was also clear that a consensus on what the future of this town of 1,557 should look like was not going to be decided at one meeting. (The population, according the U.S. Census Bureau dropped 11. 6 percent from the 1,761 in 2000 to the 2010 figure.)

It was also stressed that what was being talked about was a vision, not a plan. And it was reiterated that more meetings, discussions, input and other visions are being sought.

The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association expects to have information about the vision on its website.

TRPA recognizes 4 people for their lake spirit

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency gave out four Lake Spirit Awards at the second annual Community Appreciation Day on Sept. 27.

They were honored for going above and beyond the call of duty to protect the beauty and clarity of Lake Tahoe and the Basin environment.

Jacquie Chandler was the Lake Spirit Award winner in the citizen category from the North Shore. She was nominated for her tireless work as the volunteer executive director of Sustainable Tahoe, and the Tahoe Expo, a Geo-Tourism event designed to link prosperity with lake clarity.

John Dayberry was the Lake Spirit Award winner in the citizen category from the South Shore. He was honored for his leadership role in the World Canoe Project, which has been uniting native tribes to work together to educate and revitalize the water culture of peoples around the world.

Heather Segale was the Lake Spirit Award winner in the agency representative/environmental scientist category from the North Shore. She is the education and outreach director for UC Davis, Tahoe Environmental Research Center.

The final Lake Spirit Award winner in the agency representative/environmental scientist category was Alan Tolhurst, who passed away in July after a long battle with leukemia. Tolhurst was a leader on the El Dorado County Planning Commission for 15 years and was also a long-standing member and chair of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Advisory Planning Commission.

Nevada lawmaker who wanted TRPA disbanded changes mind

By Ed Vogel, Las Vegas Review Journal

CARSON CITY – A state legislator who helped lead the effort to pull Nevada out of the bi-state agency that controls planning and growth at the pristine Lake Tahoe has changed his mind.

After meeting with California legislators, state Sen. John Lee, D-North Las Vegas, said he does not believe that it is necessary for Nevada to drop out of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

“I see no reason pulling out of TRPA if we continue in the fashion we now have,” Lee said in a telephone conversation Thursday.

During the 2011 session, Lee and Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Minden, authored Senate Bill 271, which calls for the governor to pull Nevada out of the TRPA in 2015 unless the planning agency revises its regional plan, ends a supermajority voting requirement, and considers the effects of changing economic conditions at the lake.

A legislative committee was appointed to meet with their counterparts in California and prepare a report for the governor. Gov. Brian Sandoval, a former TRPA member, signed the bill.

Lee said he was concerned that decisions by the TRPA and the threat of lawsuits from the League to Save Lake Tahoe were blocking any type of development at the lake.

“People were blocked even from putting in new asphalt in their driveways,” Lee said. “We want to do things that make the lake economically vibrant.”

Lee said local government agencies were not asserting any control over housing and commercial development at the lake.

“Every time the TRPA did something, the league threatened to sue so they abandoned their powers. The TRPA should not be the building department for the lake,” he said.

He said California legislators were not entirely aware of the problems Nevada faced in economic development at Lake Tahoe, but now they have put together a bi-state group to iron out concerns.

Lee was defeated in the June primary election by Patricia Spearman. Since he won’t be in the Legislature in 2013, he said Settelmeyer will take the report to Sandoval that Nevada should remain in the TRPA, the bi-state agency that oversees much of the land use and environmental matters involving property surrounding Lake Tahoe.

Lee served as chairman of the legislative committee dealing with Lake Tahoe matters, while Settelmeyer was the chair of the three-member delegation assigned to meet with California.

Although the Tahoe pullout bill was approved by nine of the 11 state senators and passed the Assembly 28-14, Lee came under fire from environmental groups during his re-election battle for backing it.

Slew of authors to gather at Douglas County library

The Douglas County Public Library in Minden presents An Evening with Local Authors on Oct. 3 from 4:30 to 6:30pm.

This free event will feature an appearance by local authors Todd Borg, Elizabeth Leiknes and William Hill. Other authors participating include: Conrad Buedel and Steve Achard; Dave Anderson; Kaine Andrews; Maggy Anthony; Megan Avila; Victor Brodt; Sue Cauhape; Catherine M. Cavanaugh; Bob Chambers; Linda Chambers; Jim Darrough; George E. Gruell; Lewis Horton; Sandie La Nae; Janice Oberding; Skip Pardee; Elizabeth Patterson; Ben Rogers; and Cindy Southerland.

The authors will sell their books, meet readers, and sign autographs.

The Douglas County Public Library is located at 1625 Library Lane in Minden. For more information, call (775) 782.9841.

Soroptimist looking for grant applicants

Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe plans to grant $30,000 to a maximum of five local nonprofits in the coming year.

Organizations may apply for a grant for new and innovative programs or to make significant improvements to existing ones. The SISLT Allocations Committee will evaluate all submitted proposals based on the criteria outlined in the grant application packet. Finalists will be invited to make a presentation before the entire club, which will then vote and select the grant recipients.

Preference will be given to projects that address the needs of underserved populations and all funds must stay within the South Shore. Only nonprofit organizations without dedicated foundation support may apply.

Applications for SISLT’s 2013 Community Service Grants will be available on Sept. 30 and can be downloaded from the organization’s website. The deadline to turn them in is Nov. 9. For more information, email sisltfoundation@gmail.com.