

Scientist: Calif. has slim chance of normal winter

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

This is how dry it has been so far this season: California's chances of having a normal "water year" have fallen to around 33 percent in much of the state, according to a federal scientist.

Michael Dettinger, a hydrologist with the U.S. Geological Survey, said those dismal odds are based on the amount of rain and snow that has fallen so far this year – and the history of how much precipitation California traditionally gets in the remaining months of the rainy season.

Dettinger said most of Northern California has either a 33 percent or 34 percent chance of having a normal water year.

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Plenty of dead trees, too few biomass facilities



A truck delivers biomass to the Rio Bravo plant in Rocklin. It then goes up the conveyor belt. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Publisher's note: *This is the second of two stories about California's tree mortality and how biomass is one solution to the problem.*

By Susan Wood

If a record 129 million dead and dying trees collected over the last seven years doesn't electrify California to get serious about renewable energy like biomass, then perhaps nothing will.

State and local officials along with stakeholders have started to see the light more than ever in terms of processing biomass, which is organic matter used as fuel.

A study released this fall by a working group assigned by the California Resources Agency took a collective swipe at proposing the modern method as an alternative to burning slash piles, or worse yet, allowing them to decompose and present a fire hazard. The multi-agency effort was spawned from Senate Bill 859, which was signed by Gov. Jerry Brown last year as a comprehensive \$900 million climate control package intended to reduce carbon emissions.



It's not just forest material that can be turned into electricity. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Three times as many defunct plants versus operational biomass facilities exist in the state. Regulations are cumbersome. Space is necessary. And establishing a market can be tricky.

Placer County is wrestling with all three challenges in its creative quest with green waste management at its Eastern Regional Material Recovery Facility “MRF,” once called the landfill outside Truckee.

The plant is already surging with efficiency in what it does with area residents’ trash. Now it wants to transfer some of that waste it collects from contractors clearing the mass timber out of the forest into a biomass fuel.



A rendering of what the Cabin Creek facility between Tahoe City and Truckee could look like. Rendering/Phoenix Energy

Placer seeks to establish a place close to the basin

County officials are negotiating with Liberty Utilities to come up with a price and terms that would lead to Placer having its own 1 to 2 megawatt biomass plant on the waste facility grounds.

Four years in the making, the Cabin Creek proposal involves building an 8,000-square-foot structure where a caretaker’s residence now sits, but would be relocated. The operation would span on a strip of property along power lines and the service road, while wrapping around a cell tower. A storage

area would be designated, and operators would need another grinder to work alongside the MRF's existing one.

The concept coined a Power Purchase Agreement "PPA" went through the California Environmental Quality Act process years ago, but there were other hurdles in the tedious banter of the deal. The difficult part is that unlike other renewables biomass as a fuel source is not subsidized. Plus, natural gas is inexpensive by comparison.

Nonetheless, the light at the end of the tunnel could be Liberty's goal to go 100 percent renewable; so, many options are on the table. The percentage of the renewable energy mandate has been climbing, as California grapples with leading the world in combating climate change.



A grinder at the MRF in Placer County could be used by a future biomass company. Photo/Susan Wood

Placer County Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery had hoped a deal would be reached Dec. 15. The county and Liberty are still talking.

"We're committed to getting the biomass facility built," county Deputy Chief Executive Officer Dave Defanti said Friday. He added the results are "positive," and the county is "exploring all options."

The aim is to find a middle ground between what Liberty Utilities currently pays and what biomass would cost to generate. For now, the difference hovers at about a nickel per kilowatt.

Liberty Utilities contends there's no "deal breaker" price that would guarantee its business interest.

"Energy markets fluctuate, and what may seem like a reasonable cost now may not be in the relatively near future," Liberty spokeswoman Kathy Carter told *LTN*.

The energy purveyor brought on a 50-megawatt solar project earlier this year that is already meeting a quarter of its customers' electricity use. Another project added 10 MW more.

"Biomass energy is a renewable resource, but it's more expensive than solar and wind. Still, we understand that it also has many forest health and other benefits, so we're open to continuing to work with Placer County to take a fresh look at this," Liberty Vice President Travis Johnson said.

Currently, the MRF represents a pit stop for agencies and their contractors to funnel their treetop debris to Rio Bravo in Rocklin. Already, 5,200 tons of biomass woody debris are channeled through the Truckee area recovery plant to Rocklin.



Wood debris at the MRF at Cabin Creek could become energy one day. Photo/Provided

But that's a long, expensive haul for trees coming out of the Sierra Nevada as agencies such as Caltrans have learned. The transportation agency worked alongside the U.S. Forest Service in massive fuel reduction programs.

"To me, it makes a lot of sense," Placer County senior civil engineer Walt Schwall said of the proposed Cabin Creek on a tour this week.

He's not alone.

"We see a facility like the one in the Cabin Creek area as a tremendous option. It would not only accelerate the removal of the dead and dying trees as a result of drought, biomass facilities like that would reduce the wildfire threat by helping us catch up on the burn piles," said Tom Lotshaw,

spokesman for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

"We definitely see biomass as a viable option," Lotshaw told *LTN*.

One could even argue that processing the woody debris through an energy facility is better environmentally than burning carbon into the air. The concept of having one nearby is also an eco-improvement because fewer vehicle miles equal less carbon emissions from trucks.

Once again, the state is asked to strike that delicate balance between business and the environment. And history has shown that change in the name of progress doesn't come easy.

Still, if Cabin Creek fails to proceed with Liberty Utilities, there are other parties who may be interested, insists Brett Storey, a Placer County analyst.

The playing field is vast with possibilities.



The Loyalton biomass plant is about to resume activity.
Photo/Provided

The planned return of the Loyalton plant

Thirty-seven miles from Truckee, a 212-acre, 20-megawatt biomass facility is due to go on line again within a month in Loyalton where one once operated.

The Loyalton Biomass Plant was the site of a Sierra Pacific sawmill and biomass facility before the mill closed in 2001 and within the decade the biomass portion shut down.

American Renewable Power, the new operators based in Irvine, are in the process of adding to the 17 employees hired, and securing contracts with utilities and energy purveyors, according to Sierra Business Council President Steve Frisch. Plant manager Jim Turner expects the facility to go on line shortly after the holidays. Plant owner Steve Mueller was unavailable for comment.

The company estimated an economic windfall of \$1.7 million to the rural region over the next few decades as it sources biomass fiber from 5 million acres in nine counties within an hour's drive from the plant.

More than 40,000 tons of the woody debris are awaiting the plant's return to operation. It's expected Loyalton could process 180,000 tons a year.

Bigger plans exist beyond producing energy, given the cost inequity of processing biomass.

"There has to be another motivator," Frisch said, referring to the community-service need of ridding the California forest of its tree die-off crisis.

It takes vision to complete the mission. For example, biochar—a charcoal used as a soil amendment—is yet another "value-added" product company officials and the business council anticipate seeing out of the Loyalton plant.

"We need to do some other product in order to offset the cost," Frisch said in speaking for the Sierra County region.

“That’s why Loyalton is so important.”



Rio Bravo plant manager Chris Quijano watches the material go on a conveyor belt into the plant. Photo/Kathryn Reed

No time to waste

The burning desire to rid the Sierra Nevada of its ever-escalating tree die-off has put the big boys of biomass into action. Rio Bravo of Rocklin has processed 6,000 tons of green waste from the Lake Tahoe Basin this year.

The 50-acre plant located adjacent to Thunder Valley Casino began its quest to “re-compose” the mass timber about 30 years ago – with a five-year shutdown in the 1990s. Biomass became the answer, despite solar being a lot cheaper to produce, plant managers contend.

Today, the facility processes 35 tons of the green energy source, cranking out 24.4 megawatts of energy an hour now under contract with Southern California Edison. The plant had

earlier managed a 26-year contract with Pacific Gas & Electric.

In its daily routine, the Rocklin plant sees 50 trucks hauling 24 tons of debris. They're channeled through an elaborate system of chutes and machines that grind up and break down the treetop debris and other timber material. One megawatt can power 800 homes. Overall, 20,000 homes get their electricity in a given hour through the 25-megawatt facility.



Jeff Johnson handles the control room at the Rocklin biomass plant. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The facility represents an efficient system that operates at 87 percent capacity when the operation is not undergoing checks or audits.

It takes in wood chips and mass pine timber, along with other materials from orchard trees in what's considered its agriculture segment. Other sources from the urban sector also make their way through the processing plant.

With a state energy diversion mandate of 50 percent by 2030, much material is considered capable of being broken down and reused.

“We can make power every day,” plant manager Chris Quijano told *Lake Tahoe News* on a recent tour of the grounds. Rio Bravo is one of six biomass plants IHI Power Services Corporation runs in the United States.

The mechanics of this one in Northern California is impressive – taking 30,000 tons of high-hazard dead trees out of the woods and turning them into electricity in 2016. The power the plant generates is essentially thrown into an energy bucket to dispense.

The alternative to burning slash piles in the forest produces water vapor opposed to carbon emissions. That huge white plume from the plant is not smoke – even though there’s severe burning involved from a boiler connected to the turbine. The combination and process creates steam at 950 degrees Fahrenheit.

“And 3 million tons of high hazard trees are available,” Quijano said.

The process has other air quality benefits advocates tout.

When the mass timber goes either unburned or unprocessed as biomass, it is left in the forest to rot. The decomposition releases greenhouse gases, including methane.

Either way, following the tree from a dead state to energy commands cooperation from Mother Nature. That’s why the plant even carries a weather station on site.

The wet deluge from last year represented a trying time for plant operators. At one point, they had to deal with a lake on the property that didn’t exist before, providing a few disruptions in truck traffic for starters.

Of course, the pond brought out more birds, as a sanctuary of organic matter, dirt and water gave wildlife a place to land.

That's the circle of life meeting the cycle of material.

SnowGlobe using cover to protect ball field



A protective layer is being placed on the South Lake Tahoe ball field. Photo/LTN

While it's in the contract for the SnowGlobe to return the field to the condition it was in prior to setup for the concert, promoter Chad Donnelly is going a step further this year.

He has purchased a cover for the new field near Lake Tahoe Community College. It will be over the majority of the area.

It cost about \$1 million. There is the possibility of Donnelly renting the cover to an entity putting on an event at that location, which would help him recoup some of his costs.

Donnelly wants a long-term contract with the city. Electeds are in a wait-and-see mode with this new ball field. The cover

is seen as a step in securing SnowGlobe's future in South Lake Tahoe.

While SnowGlobe was on this field last year, at the time it was just dirt. Sod was laid this fall. Prior to 2016 the event was on the artificial turf at LTCC.

Crews began setting up for the Dec. 29-31 music festival this week, with the bulk of the infrastructure coming Christmas week.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. wildfires a looming threat to climate goals

By Julie Cart, CalMatters

Beyond the devastation and personal tragedy of the fires that have ravaged California in recent months, another disaster looms: an alarming uptick in unhealthy air and the sudden release of the carbon dioxide that drives climate change.

As millions of acres burn in a cycle of longer and more intense fire seasons, the extensive efforts of industry and regulators to protect the environment can be partly undone in one firestorm. In particular, as raging blazes pump more carbon into the atmosphere, state officials are grappling with the potential effect on California's ability to adequately reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The state's environmental regulations are known to be stringent, but they have limits: They apply only to human-caused emissions. Carbon and other pollution generated by

wildfires is outside the grasp of state law.

“The kinds of fires we’re seeing now generate millions of tons of GHG emissions. This is significant,” said Dave Clegern, a spokesman for the state Air Resources Board, a regulatory body.

In less than one week, for example, October’s Wine Country fires discharged harmful emissions equal to that of every car, truck and big rig on the state’s roads in a year. The calculations from the subsequent fires in Southern California are not yet available, but given the duration and scope of the multiple blazes, the more recent complex of fires could well exceed that level.

The greenhouse gases released when forests burn not only do immediate harm, discharging carbon dioxide and other planet-warming gases, but also continue to inflict damage long after the fires are put out. In a state where emissions from nearly every industry are tightly regulated, if wildfires were treated like other carbon emitters, Mother Nature would be castigated, fined and shut down.

The air board estimates that between 2001 and 2010, wildfires generated approximately 120 million tons of carbon. But Clegern said a direct comparison with regulated emissions is difficult, in part because of limited monitoring data.

“Nature doesn’t follow the rules very well,” said Jim Branham, executive officer at the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, a state agency that has created a plan to better harness California’s forests in reducing carbon in the atmosphere.

As is so often the case in environmental catastrophes, one thing leads to another, creating what Branham calls the double whammy: Burning trees not only release powerful pollutants known as black carbon, but once a forest is gone, its prodigious ability to absorb carbon from the atmosphere and store it is lost, too.

Scientists estimate that in severely burned areas, only a fraction of a scorched tree's emissions are released during the fire, perhaps as little as 15 percent. The bulk of greenhouse gases are released over months and years as the plant dies and decomposes.

And if a burned-out forest is replaced by chaparral or brush, that landscape loses more than 90 percent of its capacity to take in and retain carbon, according to the Conservancy.

Severe fires have the capacity to inflict profound damage in a short span. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that the 2013 Rim Fire in Central California spewed out the equivalent of the carbon dioxide emissions from 3 million cars. That is a setback to the state's effort to get cars off the road, another critical tool for reducing greenhouse gases.

The role of wildfire as a major source of pollution was identified a decade ago, when a study conducted by the National Center for Atmospheric Research concluded that "a severe fire season lasting only one or two months can release as much carbon as the annual emissions from the entire transportation or energy sector of an individual state."

It's a measure of the dramatic ramping up of fires in the West that today a single fire can meet that threshold.

The entire equation has been made worse by the state's epidemic of tree death, caused by drought, disease and insect infestation. The U.S. Forest Service this week updated its estimate of dead trees across California to 129 million. That loss alone could be a blow to the state's vision of a low-carbon future.

"Dead trees don't sequester carbon," Branham said.

Forests as carbon-chewers are part of the state's strategy for cutting greenhouse-gas emissions significantly by 2020 and beyond—a goal that could be undermined by nature's caprice.

The air board is expected to direct state agencies to determine more precisely how much carbon can be absorbed by California's variety of landscapes.

Air quality, too, is subject to state, as well as local and federal, regulations. But those standards go out the window in large fires, when soot and ash blanketing entire regions can be seen from space.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency, which sets air pollution standards nationally, has an "exceptional events" rule that exempts states from fines under certain extraordinary conditions.

California has invoked the rule during wildfires at least once before, in 2008, for fires in the Sacramento area. The request was accepted, according to the air board.

More recently, Sean Raffuse, an analyst at the Air Quality Research Center at the University of California, Davis, came up with the "back of the envelope" calculations for October's Sonoma County fires.

Raffuse said he used federal emissions inventories from fires and calculated that five days of ashy spew from the northern California blazes equated to the annual air pollution from every vehicle in California.

Those kinds of computations are seldom replicated, largely for lack of the necessary instruments present at fire sites. But things are changing. Researchers have been attempting to better understand the full range of environmental damage wrought by wildfires. One tool is drones that can be flown through smoke plumes to collect samples for analysis.

"We don't have the means to measure emissions from a wildfire like we do from a tailpipe," Branham said. "We are lagging well behind in understanding and having hard data of the effects of these fires. And most of the data are chasing

reality.”

More Placer County residents to have say in TOT spending

Placer County has created a committee to provide input into how the lodging taxes collected at Lake Tahoe should be used.

Until now the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association filled that role. But the county wanted a broader voice because not everyone is a member of the NLTRA.

The Capital Projects Advisory Committee will be co-chaired by Placer County and the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association and comprised of 13 members representing the range of community interests in project investments in eastern Placer County.

Members of the new committee will be appointed by their represented organizations. Area business associations, special districts, the NLTRA and Placer County will each appoint two members, and two at-large members will be appointed jointly by Placer County and NLTRA. Three members will represent lodging providers, the Truckee North Tahoe Transportation Management Agency and Placer’s ski resorts. Terms for most members will be two years, with at-large members appointed for an initial three-year term and two-year terms to follow.

The committee will be responsible for recommending priorities for Placer County’s Tourism Master Plan and reviewing and recommending project applications for lodging tax funding to the Board of Supervisors for approval. They’ll also conduct public meetings to review proposed projects and continually seek feedback from the community on investment priorities.

Last year, Placer County collected about \$18 million in guest lodging taxes in eastern Placer County.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Placerville soldier dies in South Korea



Eric Schenck

By Benjy Egel, Sacramento Bee

A Placerville resident and El Dorado High School graduate serving in the Army was killed last week in South Korea.

Sgt. Eric Schenck, 33, was a non-commissioned officer stationed with the 35th Air Defense Artillery Brigade at Suwon Air Base.

On Dec. 7, Schenck was returning from a field training exercise when the Humvee ambulance in which he was riding was rear-ended just before midnight, military publication *Stars and Stripes* reported.

Read the whole story

Biomass an option to Calif.'s epic tree die-off



Biomass plants emit steam, with most byproducts able to be repurposed. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Publisher's note: *This is the first of two stories about California's tree mortality and how biomass is one solution to the problem.*

By Susan Wood

As California experiences what may be its worst wildfire year on record, a multi-agency working group has sparked new ways for the state to see the forest through the trees in fire hazard regions.

Since 2010 a record 129 million dead and dying trees on 8.9

million acres have been recorded. The crisis spurred by the cycle of drought stresses the trees – the majority in the Sierra Nevada – making them susceptible to bark beetle infestation.

When agencies like the U.S. Forest Service – which manages about 80 percent of the forest around the Lake Tahoe Basin – have them cut down when they can, the trees are often thrown in slash piles ready for burning. Otherwise, they become a fire risk.

The process of open burning to deal with the huge issue lacks expediency, economic benefits and ecological sense in terms of air pollution. Moreover, the sheer volume of tree mortality is overwhelming.

“Tree mortality at this magnitude takes ongoing cooperation between public, nonprofit and private entities,” said Ken Pimlott, CalFire director and state forester.

California, where declarations of disaster from wildfires have become about as common as our holidays, needs other solutions.

Gov. Jerry Brown two years ago declared a state of emergency as the state faced “the worst epidemic of tree mortality in its modern history.”

The following year, Brown signed Senate Bill 859 into law and in part designated a working group to bring suggestions to the California Resources Agency that would define measures of how to handle the massive tree die-off posing an increasingly greater fire risk and emitting greenhouse gases into the air.

And if there’s a new and improved industry as a result, the better the state of business here, according to advocates. The climate change bill allocating \$900 million to reduce carbon emissions goes as far as to direct electricity retailers to enter into contracts with biomass facilities generating energy from wood harvested in these fire hazard areas. Biomass is

defined as organic matter used as a fuel source.

The move won applause from the California Biomass Energy Alliance's Executive Director Julee Malinowski-Ball, who commended Brown for having the vision to see the industry as part of "the state's renewable energy portfolio standard."

"How do we treat the forest so it doesn't become a source of carbon emissions?" said Claire Jahns, assistant secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency – the lead organization in the nine-member working group. "The creation of biomass is a necessary outcome of doing active forest management."

The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit agrees.

"Biomass is one tool that can be utilized to aid in hazardous fuels reduction," LTBMU Fuels Management Officer Kyle Jacobson said.

Jacobson cited the ability of reducing smoke from burning the piles onsite as one significant reason to opt for the alternative method. Turning that tree debris into energy production is another.

The plan sounds like a win-win for the economy and environment, but it has limitations requiring "mechanical access" to the tree debris location, Jacobson pointed out.

It also commands a word of caution from the Sierra Club of California. The concern is that creating an industry built on tree cutting could lead to an overzealous nature of taking out alive-and-well-timber from the forest.

"At first glance, we assume there's an endless supply of trees to build an infrastructure from. One thing to be cautious about is not every dying tree needs to be taken out," Director Kathryn Phillips told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Snags left at the end of a forest fire have an ecological purpose and should be left

alone.”

The Sierra Club worries the hazard zones may be drawn too large to accommodate this blossoming industry that could go on the offensive in seeking materials.

“All said, there are dead trees that have to be taken out. We just want sensible forest management,” Phillips said.

Bob Kingman, assistant executive officer for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, understands the concern of making business the priority. He is also a member of the state working group. Kingman realizes his Lake Tahoe Basin homeland is inundated with clusters of trees ripe for out-of-control burning as well as other hazards. Kingman worked for years at the California Tahoe Conservancy.

“Yes, it could encourage tree cutting. But right now, our forest does need more tree cutting,” he said. Kingman referenced the Wine Country wildfires of October as a situation that “adds a whole new complexity” to the hazard.

It’s believed that no more than 15 percent of the dead and dying trees is removed as needed.



The least expensive way to dispose of wood is often to burn it on site. Photo/Kathryn Reed

A trio of goals in the report

The working group's report released this fall was created with three aims in mind: Utilize the woody material pulled from high hazard zones identified by the state's Tree Mortality Task Force; promote forest health and reduce carbon emissions from burning; and spawn rural economic development.

State Sen. Ted Gaines, R-El Dorado, is all over the latter idea, but if anything, would like to see more than \$25 million dedicated to the effort and wants a wider area covered.

"I support the idea of a focused effort to better manage our forests and incorporating biomass as a way of doing that," Gaines told *Lake Tahoe News*.

But in not necessarily supporting the cumbersome SB859 climate bill, he's disappointed the allocated funds were directed to more concentrated high hazard zones instead of covering larger areas.

"This is our largest opportunity for management of the most acres," said the senator who represents Tahoe.

Gaines reflected on the human tragedy by singling out fallen firefighter Michael Hallenbeck, who died two years ago when a tree struck him as he was fighting the Sierra blaze south of Echo Summit.

Turning tragedy into tree removal programs

The state study identifies four pilot programs to turn the tree debris into wood products or biomass.

First, retrofit old mill sites into biomass plants or wood manufacturing facilities.

Second, schedule a mass timber building competition that showcases how to slap together composite panel structures and use fabricated wood products.

Third, initiate a California Conservation Corps workforce

training program to manage the transition from mass timber debris to viable wood product.

Fourth, convene a wood products summit featuring state and federal entities, entrepreneurs, community groups and industry partners.

“There is a critical need to bolster our biomass processing capacity and expand uses for wood products not only to handle dead trees in the short term but also to assist with ongoing forest management and restoration,” California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird said.

Even as convincing as the biomass idea is, the potentially burgeoning industry doesn’t come without challenges that go beyond the caution of turning a depleting resource into a state-sanctioned form of commerce.

For starters, the plants at this point are few and far between, as Caltrans program manager Lisa Worthington admits. The state agency must remove hazard trees along its highway system. Arranging for the trees to be taken through contractors to biomass facilities miles away can pose a big expense in transportation costs.

The hope is more plants get on board. Worthington counted 107,608 trees removed since just March 2016, so the need is great. As it stands today, there are about three times as many dormant biomass sites in the state as operational ones.

“The need is enormous,” Worthington said.



This material is refined wood product that the biomass plant will turn into electricity. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Specifics are on the way

The state resources report set into motion a breakdown of specific committees tasked with handling the goals and pilot programs associated with solutions like retrofitting more biomass plants. One such group will be tasked with removing barriers that hinder a convenient path to redevelop sites – as in the convoluted permitting process.

From there, an information clearinghouse would be formed to provide resources for developers of the wood products manufacturing industry.

Applied research like Humboldt State University's "Waste to Wisdom" Biomass Research and Development Initiative studying converting forest residue into renewable fuel would be supported by the state.

Plus, the California Wood Innovations Small Grants Program would be created to reward funds to those with enlightening ideas.

Local jurisdictions could seize state grant money to fund a

mass timber building competition similar to Oregon's, where \$200,000 was awarded to a developer using cross-laminated timber.

Big timber projects featuring buildings six stories or taller made with pre-engineered wood products have been erected all over. One proposal, called the Splinter, features a building 100 stories high in London. In Chicago, an 80-story structure has been designed. Those following the trends have coined the term "plyscrapers." In some cases, hybrid buildings made from pre-engineered wood, concrete and steel are thought to be more rigid, according to architects working with the mixed use.

Governments at the state and federal level have been forced to look inward in coming up with solutions to getting rid of its wood debris.

Case in point, the wood on federal lands is prohibited from being exported overseas from the Western United States.

Through a little-known federal rule, U.S. Code 620, the export of federal timber west of the 100th meridian has been banned since 1973. Timber affected by the Forest Resources Conservation and Shortage Relief Act must be deemed a surplus species through a regulatory process involving the U.S. Department of Agriculture to waive the ban. The Forest Service has specifically declined to comment on the matter.

"The USFS does not comment on legislative activity or potential outcomes," Washington spokeswoman Veronica Hinke told *Lake Tahoe News*.

U.S. House Republican Tom McClintock of Elk Grove is attempting to circumvent obstacles. The congressman introduced legislation – the Emergency Forest Restoration Act – with the intent of using the state governor's emergency declaration to expedite the removal of dead and dying trees.

HR865 piggybacks off the Resilient Federal Forests Act, which

simplifies environmental regulations and hastens the removal of trees associated with fire-killed timber.

“After 45 years of experience with these laws (under the National Environmental Policy Act), I think we’re entitled to ask: ‘How are the forests doing?’ The answer is damning,” McClintock said in remarks in support of HR2936.

With more than 58 million acres of national forest at high or very high risk of severe wildfires, the crisis demands an all hands on deck approach.

The Tree Mortality Task Force said 860,000 dead trees have been removed – over half by the Forest Service, the agency revealed this week.

To help with the woody-biomass solution, the USFS recently announced \$9 million to be awarded to competitive wood products and energy distribution projects. Applications are due by Jan. 22.

Weather gets credit for Calif. emissions dip

By Julie Cart, CalMatters

As Gov. Jerry Brown was making his way through Europe this fall, striking an evangelical tone about the global peril represented by climate change, California’s Air Resources Board released good news about emissions reported by companies covered under the state’s cap-and-trade system.

Its report showed greenhouse gas emissions reduced by almost 5 percent in 2016, propelling the state toward meeting its

ambitious goals. And for that we can thank Mother Nature.

According to analyses from the air board and independent experts, last year's emissions drops came about not because of technological breakthroughs or drastic pollution reductions from oil refineries or other industries, nor did the lauded cap-and-trade program make a significant difference.

It was the rain.

Record winter precipitation, especially in the northern part of the state, brought hydroelectric dams back into play and allowed utilities to rely less on gas-fired power. And the air board's report credits electricity generation for the biggest cuts: Emissions from in-state electricity generation decreased more than 19 percent last year, and emissions from imported electricity dropped nearly 23 percent.

And California's policy continues to add green power to the grid: Large-scale solar generation increased by 32 percent and wind generation increased by 11 percent.

That trend is in keeping with a report issued last month by the California Public Utilities Commission that found that the state's major utilities have met or will soon exceed the target of 33 percent clean electric energy by 2020.

On the other hand, emissions from oil refineries, transportation fuels and cement plants increased slightly. In the case of the cement manufacturing, the air board attributed the increase to ramped up production.

The report does not take into account all the state's greenhouse gas emissions in any given year; only those from entities covered under cap and trade are required to report. Much of the highly polluting transportation sector, for example, is not regulated.

The air board report did not attribute the emissions decrease

to any one of the state's myriad programs intended to reduce energy consumption and industrial pollution. But the world heard a different story from Brown's during his trip to attend the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Bonn, Germany.

The governor was an enthusiastic salesman of the cap-and-trade program, in which certain industries are required to limit their emissions. If they operate under their caps, the companies may sell any carbon "credits" in an auction or on the private market.

When laying out the California environmental success story to the world last month, Brown most often mentioned cap and trade as the cornerstone of the the state's policies. At one point, the governor met with Chinese officials in Bonn, and suggested the nation, as the planet's largest polluter, join California's carbon trading market, which already includes the Canadian province of Quebec.

The most recent auction results indicate why cap and trade is popular with some legislators, having raised nearly \$5 billion since its inception. The end of November's permit auction achieved record-high sales of \$800 million, with every permit sold.

But it is not a prime mover of greenhouse gas reductions, and the air board considers it an adjunct program supporting California's other policies. Brown, however, has made cap and trade a signature policy, and he's its fiercest defender.

The governor expended enormous political capital pushing through legislation to extend cap and trade until 2030. At one point during this summer's debate, he addressed a state Senate committee and told legislators, "This is the most important vote of your life."

Given the emphasis he's placed on the program, it seems to under-deliver on real carbon-cutting results. But in an interview with *CalMatters*, Brown denied he gives cap and trade

primacy over other of the state's carbon-cutting programs.

"That's not true. I don't talk only about it," he said during the interview in Bonn. "I talk about solar, about electric cars. Energy efficiency. You want to say cap and trade is not that important (for greenhouse gas reduction). I know that. I'm Mr. 'It Ain't That Much.' It isn't that much. Everybody here is hype, hype to the skies."

Researchers have reached the same conclusion. Analysts at Near Zero, a think tank affiliated with the Carnegie Institution for Science at Stanford University, presented an analysis of state climate policy at an Energy Seminar in October and found that the last economic recession is responsible for about half of observed greenhouse gas reductions since the passage of the law that instituted cap and trade.

This finding is consistent with a Legislative Analyst's Office report from earlier this year.

For Democratic Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia of Bell Gardens, it's time to recognize the other programs that are helping the state meet its emission-reduction goals.

"We definitely have a responsibility when we are out here on the world stage and saying to people, learn from us. One is making it clear that we have a portfolio of initiatives," said Garcia, who was also attending the U.N. conference in Bonn. As example, she cited the state's requirement to procure power from renewable resources, its clean air policy, and its push to electrify the transportation fleet. "Cap and trade is a piece of it," she said, "but it's not all of what we do."

Nev. Superfund Anaconda Mine targeted by EPA

By Kristen Edwards, KRNV-TV

The Environmental Protection Agency added the Anaconda Mine in Nevada to a list of Superfund sites that require immediate action.

The Anaconda Mine site has groundwater contamination, waste rock areas, and contaminated process areas.

“Getting toxic land sites cleaned up and revitalized is of the utmost importance to the communities across the country that are affected by these sites,” EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in a statement.

[Read the whole story](#)