

Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

Farm Bureau of Ventura County will conduct its annual business meeting and election of directors this year on Thursday, May 19. The event will be from 8:30 to 11 a.m. in the spectacular new Martin V. and Martha K. Smith Pavilion at the Museum of Ventura County, 100 E. Main St., Ventura.

Save the Date!

Farm Bureau Annual Meeting

Thursday, May 19 • 8:30-11 a.m.

Martin V. & Martha K. Smith Pavilion

Museum of Ventura County

100 E. Main St., Ventura

The special guest speaker this year will be Christopher Stephens, director of the Ventura County Resource Management Agency. The RMA includes several divisions that conduct programs or administer regulations

that have a direct and powerful impact on agricultural land and farming operations. These include the Planning Division, the Environmental Health Division, the Building and Safety Division and the Code Compliance Division. Chris has agreed to address a number of issues of interest to our members, including the upcoming supervisorial redistricting process.

Save the date. You'll be receiving more information about the meeting within the next few weeks.

Board postpones decision on study guidelines

Among the activities currently being conducted by divisions encompassed within the RMA, few have drawn more intense interest than the revision of the county's Initial Study Assessment Guidelines (ISAGs). This somewhat arcane document provides guidance to county staff members charged with evaluating applications for discretionary permits from county agencies for projects with the potential to adversely affect a variety of protected resources. These protected resources include clean air and water, wildlife habitat, plant and animal species of special concern, native vegetation, and agricultural resources such as water, soils and farmland.

The ISAGs are intended to help county staff determine the magnitude of a project's potential impacts, so they can decide what sort of environmental document – a full environmental review, a negative declaration or a mitigated negative declaration – must be conducted in order to comply with

the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Signed into law in 1970 by Gov. Ronald Reagan, CEQA is a powerful and far-reaching statute that compels evaluation and public disclosure of the impacts associated with certain actions taken by public agencies. When that action is to issue a "discretionary" permit – one requiring the exercise of judgment or deliberation by the agency – the reach of CEQA extends into the private project or activity requiring such a permit.

The ISAGs themselves neither authorize nor prohibit any type of project or activity. They simply establish thresholds to be used by agency staff in determining whether additional study of a project's potential impact is required in order to conform with CEQA.

The current ISAGs are nearly 20 years old, and the County Planning Division has been working on an update since July 2008 to reflect legislation, court decisions and amendments to the county General Plan that have occurred since 1992.

Nearly all the proposed ISAG revisions developed since 2008 by the Planning Division were adopted last July by the Board of Supervisors. Confusion and opposition regarding one section of the ISAGs – the one pertaining to biological resources – prompted the board to postpone consideration of that section until the Planning Division had conducted additional outreach to the affected community, which in this case primarily comprises land-owning farmers and ranchers.

After several meetings and workshops – and submission of formal comment letters by a number of organizations, including Farm Bureau of Ventura County – planning staff returned to the Board of Supervisors on March 1 with a substantially revised and improved document that incorporates many of the changes we sought.

Farm Bureau had its CEQA expert in the California Farm Bureau Federation's Legal Services Division review the ISAGs both before and after they were revised, and our attorney found nothing sufficiently detrimental to our members' interests to warrant formal opposition to their adoption. The reason for this is that almost none of the activities carried out by farmers and ranchers – from planting, cultivating and harvesting crops, to constructing most types of barns and fences, and clearing new ground for crops or forage – requires a discretionary permit. All these activities are therefore outside the scope of CEQA, and the ISAGs do not apply to them.

I testified accordingly during the public hearing on March 1, saying Farm Bureau was taking a neutral stand on the revised guidelines. I did note, however, that this position is conditional.

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What's Inside?

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- **Task force focuses on weeds in the Santa Clara River**
- **Member Benefits**

Written IIPP helps reduce risk of injuries on the farm

By Mike Klimenko

As an employer, paying close attention to safety protects the health of your employees and helps you comply with Cal/OSHA regulations. One of the most important tools for employers, including those in agriculture, is an Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP).

California employers are required by law to have a written IIPP in place and readily available if state inspectors show up at the farm or ranch. Employers are subject to substantial fines if a Cal/OSHA officer inspects your operation and cites you for failure to maintain an IIPP.

The IIPP includes procedures that you put into practice. Part of an employer's responsibility is to control potential workplace hazards and correct hazardous conditions or practices as they occur or are recognized. The IIPP includes a system for you to communicate with your employees on matters relating to occupational safety and health, including provisions designed to encourage employees to inform you of hazards at the worksite without fear of reprisal.

The safety communications system, one of the elements of the IIPP, should be in a form readily understandable by all affected employees. The safety communication system may include meetings, training programs, postings, written communications, a system for anonymous notification by employees about hazards, labor/management safety and health committees, and other means of ensuring communication with employees.

There are three main elements to an IIPP program: safety training, safety inspections and accident investigations.

At State Fund, we conduct workshops to help you complete your IIPP and thereby take a big step toward creating a safer workplace. Agricultural employers can obtain one of our IIPP binders by participating in one of our four-hour IIPP workshops. These workshops are designed to show employers how to actually create and maintain an effective IIPP for an agricultural operation.

To find when an IIPP workshop will be conducted in your area, check the State Fund website at www.statefundca.com/safety/seminars/Seminars.aspx.

In addition to the workshops, State Fund also has a user friendly downloadable guide to building an IIPP that is designed to help you establish the following requirements for a safe workplace:

- Management commitment/assignment of responsibilities

- Safety communications system with employees
- System for assuring employee compliance with safe work practices
- Scheduled inspections/evaluation system
- Accident investigation
- Procedures for correcting unsafe/unhealthy conditions
- Safety and health training and instruction
- Recordkeeping and documentation

The guide can be accessed at www.statefundca.com/employers/NewBusiness/safetycenter/IIPP.asp.

State Fund helps employers make their workplaces safer by offering comprehensive loss control services. Safety & Health Services supports this mission by providing quality services, products and professional expertise. Our efforts help protect California employees and help our policyholders manage their workers' compensation costs. Our extensive workplace safety and training programs are designed to prevent injuries each year and help protect California's most valuable asset: its people.

State Fund's safety and health services are

offered at no extra charge to policyholders and include educational programs, materials and inspections:

- Safety & Health Services ergonomic evaluations, air sampling, and on-site inspections, that can save employers thousands of dollars in injuries and illnesses.
- Safety educational materials including pamphlets, manuals, booklets and safety sheets
- Assistance in Cal/OSHA compliance.

State Fund recognizes that your loss-control efforts affect the frequency and severity of injuries and illnesses in your work environment. Our experience shows that with informed planning and education, workplace injuries and illnesses can be reduced or eliminated. We are committed to the belief that a safe workplace can increase worker productivity and lower your workers' compensation costs.

For this reason, State Fund has prepared a catalog of safety materials as a service to policyholders. The catalog may be downloaded at www.statefundca.com/pdf/e17839.pdf.

— Mike Klimenko is Farm Bureau Group manager for State Compensation Insurance Fund. He may be contacted at mnklimenko@scif.com.

Task force focuses on weeds in Santa Clara River

By Sabrina Drill

Wildland weeds, also known as invasive plants, are non-native plant species that can take over natural areas. They reduce habitat quality, impact recreation, can increase the risk of fires and floods, and can reduce forage quality on grazed lands. In the Santa Clara River, invasive weeds in riparian areas crowd out native vegetation and can alter both the ecology and the hydrology of the system.

The most problematic invasive plant in these areas is *Arundo donax*, commonly called giant reed, giant cane, or just arundo. You can see large, monotypic stands of the plant as you drive along Highway 126 through the Santa Clara Valley, or at the estuary near Harbor Boulevard between Ventura and Oxnard. Other invasive plants of concern in the watershed include the riparian weed tamarisk and groundcovers such as German ivy and greater periwinkle, and upland species including Scotch and Spanish broom, the poisonous castor bean, and rangeland weeds such as artichoke thistle and ripgut brome. While only a small number of the exotic plants that grow in California become invasive, management of these species can cost millions of dollars.

Wildland weeds present one of the most important threats to the conservation of open space and agricultural lands in the Santa Clara River. This represents a concern for the entire Southern California region, as the Santa Clara is one of largest rivers in the region, and one of the few that remain in a highly natural state. The watershed runs all the way from the Acton/Agua Dulce area on the east, to Lockwood Valley and Ojai in the north (Sespe and Piru Creeks are part of the Santa Clara Watershed), to the Oxnard Plain. It supports both a rural farming lifestyle, and a number of endangered species such as the southern steelhead trout, the unarmored 3-spine stickleback, the southwestern willow flycatcher, and least Bell's vireo.

For years, the Los Angeles County Weed Management Area, along with the Ventura Resource Conservation District and the City of Santa Clarita, has led the charge against weeds in the upper portions of the watershed, while the newer Ventura Weed Management Area has worked in the lower watershed. Now a new group has grown out of these efforts, the Santa Clara River Invasive Weeds Task Force (SCRITWF).

(continued on back page)

Notes from the CEO (continued from front page)

"As you may be aware," I told the board, "at least two other county ordinance revisions are currently under way, and both have the potential to change this situation. The Fire Protection District is still developing standards to regulate application of mulch in certain parts of the county, as part of the Fire Code. And the Public Works Division is still developing a new grading ordinance incorporating standards applicable to a wide range of agricultural activities. Depending on the final form of these fire and grading standards, there is the potential for a host of longstanding agricultural practices to suddenly require discretionary county permits and thereby trigger CEQA assessment."

"Until those ordinances and standards are finalized, it is therefore not possible to fully assess the potential impact of the proposed Initial Study Assessment Guidelines on day-to-day farming and ranching practices. In the interest of full disclosure and better internal policy coordination on the part of the county, I respectfully urge you to postpone final adoption of these guidelines until the fire and grading standards are in place."

Several dozen other speakers also addressed the board that day, most expressing opposition to the biological resources section, or hostility toward the regulatory process. Some of the comments revealed continued confusion or uncertainty regarding the ISAGs and their impact on agricultural activities.

These comments included assertions that the ISAGs would prevent construction of fencing to exclude animals from cropland as required by food-safety rules; that they would prevent citrus growers from planting alternative crops in the event that the Asian citrus psyllid and the deadly disease it transmits wipe out the county's citrus industry; and that the ISAGs would prevent expansion of agriculture into the hillsides, thereby depriving the industry of a strategy that's critical to its survival.

Agricultural fencing does not require a discretionary county permit. Neither does replanting of crops — trees in orchards are replaced all the time, strawberries give way to celery or tomatoes or cilantro, and all this takes place without government interference or involvement.

As for expansion into the hillsides, the clearing of land for crops does not typically require a discretionary approval unless there's enough earth movement involved to trigger the need for a grading permit. But that's the case now, with or without the ISAGs. The rela-


tively minor amount of still-unplanted hillside land in the county that has suitable soils and a water supply adequate and reliable enough to support crops is valuable to its owners, and would be a welcome addition to the local agricultural base. But that expansion is not the key to the industry's future. Agriculture's continued viability in Ventura County depends on keeping the 97,000 acres of existing irrigated land in production.

Following the public hearing, the Board of Supervisors agreed to provide one more delay for additional meetings and outreach, setting April 26 as the target for final adoption. The board also directed staff to develop a mechanism by which the ISAGs could be revisited in the event that the final grading and mulching standards change the scope of activities to which they apply.

I know that some of our members are unhappy with Farm Bureau's position on the ISAGs, and feel we should have taken a different stand in the interest of defending "property rights." But our board and I, and the CFBF legal team we rely upon to inform our policy deliberations, have determined that our current position is consistent with our organizational policies, our mission, and the long-term interests of Ventura County's entire agricultural industry. That industry, like our membership, includes not just property owners but also growers who lease or rent land, labor contractors, sharecroppers, management and consulting firms, equipment sellers, plumbers, electricians, lawyers, accountants and a host of other individuals and entities whose financial well-being depends on a vibrant agricultural economy.

Farm Bureau of Ventura County works for all of them. We can't always make them all happy. But we always do our best to keep them in business.

— John Krist is chief executive officer of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County. Contact him at john@farmbureauvc.com.



NOTARY SERVICE
Free to Members*
Call Kathy at 289-0155

*Exception: Home loan documents

Member Benefits

TICKETS & DISCOUNTS

Farm Bureau members qualify for discounts on admission to many of Southern California's most popular theme parks and other attractions. To take advantage of any of these special offers, drop by the Farm Bureau office at 5156 McGrath St. in Ventura. You can also place an order and pay by phone, and have the tickets mailed to you. For more information, contact Cissy Perez-Haas at (805) 289-0155. Have your membership number handy. We accept Visa and MasterCard.

Aquarium of the Pacific — Adult (Age 12+):

\$18.95 (save \$6); Child (age 3-11): \$10.95 (save \$2).
Valid through 12/31/11.

California Adventure and Disneyland one-day

Park Hopper — Adult (age 10+): \$96 (save \$5); Child (age 3-9): \$88 (save \$3). Valid through 12/31/11.

Cinemark Theatres — Platinum ticket, valid any show time at all Cinemark & Century locations: \$8 (savings \$3.50). Additional premiums may be applied for specially priced films and/or events priced higher than normal box office. No expiration.

Knott's Berry Farm — Adult (12 yrs.+): \$31.95 (save \$25.04); Junior/Senior (age 3-11 yrs.) (62 yrs.+): \$22.95 (save \$2.04). Valid through 12/31/11.

Legoland — General use ticket: \$55.95 (save \$13 adult, \$3 child) + 2nd day FREE. Resort Hopper General: \$65.95 (save \$23 adult, \$13 child). Valid through 12/31/11. Includes two visits to Legoland, including new Water Park when open, and two visits to Sea Life Aquarium.

Magic Mountain — General use ticket: Adult (48" + tall): \$27.95, (save \$32.04); Child (under 48" tall): \$18.95 (save \$16.04). Valid through 12/31/11.

Regal Cinemas — Unrestricted tickets \$8.25 (regularly \$9.50 Sun.-Thurs, \$10 Fri.-Sat). Good at Edwards, Regal, Signature and United Artists Theaters. No expiration.

San Diego Sea World — \$49.95 (Save \$20 per adult; Save \$10 per child) Adult /Child Ticket (3 yrs.+). Valid through 12/31/11.

San Diego Safari Park — (Formerly Wild Animal Park) Adult-African Tram Safari: \$33.95 (save \$6.05) (12 yrs.+); Child-African Tram Safari: \$26.95 (save \$3.05) (3-11 yrs.). Africa Tram Safari includes admission, unlimited use of the Journey into Africa Tour, Conservation Carousel and all shows/exhibits. Valid through 01/31/12.

San Diego Zoo — Adult (age 12+): \$33.95 (save \$6.05). Child (age 3-11): \$26.95 (save \$3.05). Valid through 01/31/12.

See's Candy gift certificate — One-pound box \$13.45 (Save \$2.65). No expiration.

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MISSION STATEMENT

We represent the broad and dynamic interests of the agricultural industry through our diverse membership. We serve members by delivering services, promoting policies, developing coalitions, and fostering community action that will ensure the long-term success of agriculture in Ventura County.

FARM BUREAU OF VENTURA COUNTY

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Task force focuses on weeds in Santa Clara River *(continued from page 2)*

This new task force will coordinate watershed-wide efforts, with a focus on sharing information, simplifying the permitting process, and helping to seek out funding for management efforts. The SCRIWTF is co-chaired by UC Cooperative Extension, an entity active in both counties, and The Nature Conservancy, the largest conservation land owner in the watershed. In addition leadership for the group comes from the Agricultural Commissioner's Offices and the Resource Conservation Districts in both counties.

In addition to this work, UC Cooperative Extension is working with the Ventura Weed Management Area to produce a fact sheet series about invasive plants and their management, which will be available soon. For more information about the Santa Clara River Invasive Weeds Task Force, and to join the mailing list, visit <http://ucanr.org/sites/SCRIWTF/>. For more on the Ventura Weed Management Area, visit <http://www.vcwma.org/>.

— Sabrina Drill is a natural resources advisor with the UC Cooperative Extension in Ventura and Los Angeles Counties. Contact her at sldrill@ucdavis.edu.

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