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TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors

FROM: Thomas M. Miller, County Executive Officer
By Brett Storey, Senior Management Analyst

DATE: October 23, 2007

SUBJECT: Final Wildfire Protection & Biomass Utilization Strategic Plan

ACTION REQUESTED:

Request that the BOS provide direction and/or approve the Wildfire Protection/Biomass Utilization Strategic Plan subject to yearly budget approvals.

BACKGROUND:

In April 2007 a 5-year wildfire protection and biomass utilization strategic plan and associated budget to implement the plan was presented to the BOS.

The Wildfire Protection & Biomass Policy team has been working to develop programs to enhance Placer County's ability to prevent catastrophic wildfire and to utilize our vast renewable biomass load. That draft strategic plan was written and distributed to various agencies and public groups for review. It outlines the county's vision and visual roadmaps of activities that are planned which involve federal, state, and local agencies and community groups to ensure that an optimum balance of ecological and economical issues are addressed.

The plan has been through a thorough review and been updated to reflect our stakeholders input and streamlined to allow for implementation of the plans and projects detailed.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no impact to the General Fund as a result of this action. This year's budget and grant funds are projected to support the activities which are being implemented via this plan.

Attachment: 1) Final Wildfire Protection & Biomass Utilization Strategic Plan
TM/BS



Placer County
California

Review Draft

**Strategic Plan for the
Wildfire Protection and Biomass Utilization
Program**

October 2007



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VISION

The Placer County vision for our future is:

In order to better the County and its lands; by protecting its citizens, their property, and our environment; and to assure the future ability to maintain an enjoyable quality of life; we will embark on a path to reduce the threat of a catastrophic wildfire, while deriving the most optimum method of converting unwanted woody biomass into a beneficial commodity. To accomplish this vision, the Wildfire Protection and Biomass Utilization Program was developed in Placer County (County). The goal of the Program is to promote projects that will diminish the threat of catastrophic wildfires, improve public health and safety, reduce pollution, and enhance our environment. In addition, Placer County will advance environmentally-sound economic opportunities for the utilization of the County's renewable biomass resources to produce heat and/or electrical power, alternative transportation fuels, or beneficial bio-based chemicals and products.

It is the intent of Placer County to advance this vision in terms understandable to all citizens, such that they understand that the County intends to protect its communities and the natural environment in conjunction with promoting forest health in practical ways. It is our hope that this mission will gain acceptance from all groups and individuals living, working, and caring about Placer County.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many of the forests in Placer County have an unnatural excess accumulation of woody biomass due to decades of fire suppression activities. In addition to contributing to poor forest health, excess biomass greatly increases the risk of catastrophic wildfire. To address this issue, Placer County established the Wildfire Protection and Biomass Utilization Program (hereafter referred to as "Program"). The main goals of the Program are to:

- Reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires in Placer County.
- Protect Placer County citizens and visitors from the consequences of catastrophic wildfires.
- Find one or more beneficial uses for excess biomass in Placer County.
- Improve air quality in Placer County.

In recent years, technological advancements and incentives to use renewable resources for energy generation have enabled biomass-powered energy facilities to become established. Currently, establishment of one or more economically sustainable facility that converts biomass into power, fuel, or another valued commodity appears to be the County's best option for managing excess biomass and reducing the severity of wildfires. However, there are several constraints to establishing a biomass facility. These constraints include the ability to reliably procure and transport biomass feedstock; the

ability to establish requisite infrastructure; the ability to obtain air quality permitting of the facility; and the ability to attract private investors (among other constraints).

The County has identified several key actions that will help it in meeting Program objectives. These include educating public citizens; developing strategic alliances with public and private partners; conducting coordinated and transparent planning; and obtaining grant funding. To accomplish wildfire safety objectives, the County will continue to implement established programs (e.g., Chipper Program) while implementing several new programs (e.g., Biomass Box Program). To accomplish biomass utilization objectives, the County will coordinate or conduct technical studies designed to determine if it is feasible to establish a biomass facility in the County, and it will solicit interest and assistance from public and private stakeholders. This Strategic Plan provides the path for Placer County to effectively protect its communities from the threat of catastrophic wildfire, and to efficiently manage biomass resources that are a large component of that threat. If Program goals are met, Placer County will be a safer, healthier, and more enjoyable place for all.

INTRODUCTION

In July of 2006 the State of California issued its "Bioenergy Action Plan", which describes State-level challenges and goals for enhanced biomass resource utilization. Strategies for reaching goals outlined in the Bioenergy Action Plan are being developed concurrent with the federal government's "Biomass Research and Development Initiative". Both the Bioenergy Action Plan and the Biomass Research and Development Initiative were developed in response to President Bush's "Biofuels Initiative", an ongoing directive designed to facilitate national management of biomass resources. With Governor Schwarzenegger's release of the Bioenergy Action Plan and the associated Roadmap for Development of Biomass Resources, California municipalities now have a clear path for the coordination and implementation of biomass research and development activities (CEC 2006)

Program History

The Placer County Board of Supervisors (BOS) recently embarked on a path to combat the threat of catastrophic wildfire and protect its citizens from the devastating effects such a wildfire would have. In May 2005, the BOS formally allocated an increase in funds for wildfire hazard mitigation and other fire safety activities. Then in April 2006, the BOS authorized the CEO to hire a Biomass Manager to examine options for reducing the abundance of flammable woody biomass in the County. Specifically, the Biomass Manager would oversee and coordinate Placer County's efforts to: (1) determine the feasibility of removing woody biomass from forest lands in the County; and (2) examine the options for using excess biomass to generate economically-sustainable forms of energy or other beneficial products. To ensure these efforts have a positive effect on County wildlands and citizens, the BOS has outlined several specific tasks that it would like accomplished. Through participation in the Biomass Technical Committee and the Wildfire Protection & Biomass Policy Advisory group; the Biomass

Manager, other pertinent County staff, several state and federal agency personnel, and various private consultants are working in support of the BOS' stated direction, and several fire protection and biomass related activities have already been accomplished.

Placer County's proactive approach in addressing biomass management has provided the County with the unique opportunity to lead the state by being the first County to implement elements of the Bioenergy Action Plan. It also provides the County with the opportunity to develop partnerships and capitalize on state and federal funding for biomass programs. This Strategic Plan provides direction for Placer County to address biomass removal and utilization; coordinate with state and federal programs; develop strategic partnerships; and effectively and efficiently protect Placer County communities from catastrophic wildfire.

Over the past seven years Placer County has invested over two million dollars into fire prevention activities. These activities have included building fuel breaks, developing programs to inform citizens on how to prevent fires, implementing wood chipper programs, building community support through Fire Safe Councils, establishing defensible space areas, and providing for forest health programs. In addition, the County and State fire organizations have spent millions of dollars to prevent wildfires in Placer County.

Program Area

Placer County, California is located east of Sacramento between Nevada County (to the north) and El Dorado County (to the south). The County stretches from the edge of the Central Valley, east through the foothills and Sierra Nevada to Lake Tahoe and the Nevada border (Figure 1). Approximately half of the County's 969,600 acres are forested. This includes considerable portions of the Tahoe National Forest and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Placer County has experienced a relatively rapid population growth during the last several decades. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, the County's population grew from 172,796 people in 1990 to 248,399 in 2000. This represents a 43.75% increase; only San Benito County experienced more rapid growth in the state. In 2006, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the County's population had grown an additional 31% since the year 2000 (approximately 324,000 residents). Much of the County's recent growth has been in communities along the wildland-urban interface ("WUI") in both forested and oak woodland environments.

Sixty percent of Lake Tahoe's west shore is located within the County. Population growth in the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin) has been modest compared to other regions of the County; however, the overall population of the Basin at any given time is highly linked to the number of visitors. Lake Tahoe is a national and international tourist destination, and the Basin's economy is significantly dependent on the resort, recreational, and gaming industries. In addition to its economic importance, the Basin provides numerous other benefits including water supply, terrestrial and aquatic habitat, and aesthetic enjoyment. Due to its famed clarity and unique features, Lake Tahoe was

designated an *Outstanding National Resource Water*. This designation provides the lake with an additional level of protection under the federal Clean Water Act.

To help protect people and their property from potentially catastrophic wildfires, the National Fire Plan (as drafted by federal agencies in 2000) directs funding to be provided for projects designed to reduce the fire risks to communities. A fundamental step in achieving this goal was the identification of communities that are at high risk of damage from wildfire. Thirty-nine of the 1,264 communities currently categorized as at-risk are located in Placer County. Some of these communities have already been affected by wildfire. Since 2001, four major fires have occurred in Placer County (i.e., the Gap, Ponderosa, Star, and Ralston fires). These fires consumed over 30,000 acres of forest, cost millions of dollars to fight, and resulted in injuries to dozens of firefighters (Figure 2).

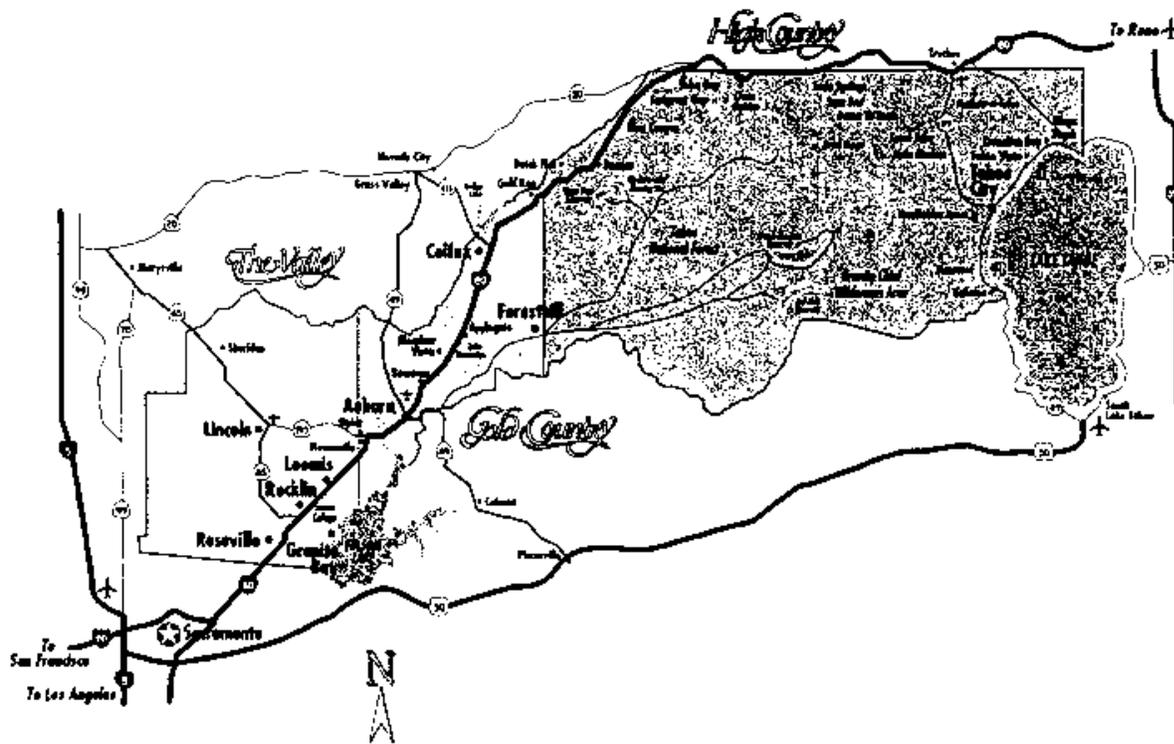


Figure 1. Placer County.

