

Amador Ledger-Dispatch

'Cool county' converts hope supes will revisit initiative

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Scott Haggerty used to be a skeptic.

The Alameda County supervisor and registered Republican wasn't always certain global warming was a legitimate crisis, at least not until a convincing PowerPoint presentation and his own kids changed his mind. But after Will Travis of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission made his pitch to the fellow dad, Haggerty was a skeptic no longer.

"It's hard to react to this problem without thinking of the world we're going to leave behind (for our children)," said Travis, executive director of a state agency charged with overseeing the San Francisco coast.

It's a turnaround that Haggerty hopes to bring to the elected officials of Amador County, who last month rejected a proposal to join a nationwide "Cool Counties" global warming initiative that Alameda and dozens of other California counties have joined. The 3-2 vote was made, in part, because of Amador County supervisors' skepticism toward the existence of global warming.

Supervisors also felt the state and federal governments were doing enough on their own, and that the county's efforts didn't need to be expanded, explained District 3 Supervisor Ted Novelli, who originally voted with District 4 Supervisor Louis Boitano to table the matter before casting the minority vote to pass the resolution.

"I personally thought that we needed more information ... to find out where they were coming from and what they wanted us to do," Novelli said Thursday.

Sierra Club spokesman Josh Dormer admitted the initiative can give some policy makers pause before they know what's being asked of their communities, but added it's "increasingly rare to find actual skepticism about the existence of global warming and what the cause is."

Modeled after the "Cool Cities" initiative that has added upward of 700 members since 2005, the Cool Counties Climate Stabilization Declaration, as it's officially called, premiered last July when the Sierra Club and 12 large counties promised an 80 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. The initiative also asks for reductions in waste, increased forest conservation efforts and support for the federal government to adopt stricter emission standards.

Despite continued skepticism about the existence of global warming here in

Amador County, state legislators and water officials are in agreement that it is one of several factors accelerating California's burgeoning water crisis.

The state has just entered what officials fear will be the second straight drought year, with reservoirs already significantly below average levels for this time of year, and with "the vagaries of climate change," as Department of Water Resources Director Lester Snow called them last week, more droughts of increasing severity may be in California's future.

The situation is so potentially dire that Sen. Dave Cogdill (R-Modesto), who is shopping around the governor's \$9 billion water bill, said the state may no longer be able to rely on the Sierras as a reliable source of spring run-off, a resource that has lasted, he said, "for eons."

"I think it's unfortunate that people are still debating that global warming exists when the science is clear," Dormer said.

Haggerty, for one, is baffled by the supervisors' decision not to join in a fight that has captured global attention.

"I don't know how a board of supervisors, in all sincerity, can have a vote on climate change and have a split vote," he said.

Aside from criticism from Bay Area officials and Washington D.C. environmentalists, however, there has been virtually no local outcry over the county's decision. Only one person spoke in support of the resolution at the Sept. 19 board of supervisors meeting, while nearly 200 county residents signed a form e-mail protesting it. Meanwhile, the county's local conservation group, Foothill Conservancy, has remained publicly silent on the issue.

"The conservancy works on a local and regional level and we generally don't get involved with global issues where we have little to no say," explained Executive Director Chris Wright.

While supervisors have voiced skepticism over the existence of global warming, individual agency heads at the water agency and air district, for instance, have referred to climate change as a foregone conclusion. As the state considers how best to reinvest in its water infrastructure, Amador Water Agency General Manager Jim Abercrombie said climate change was one of the driving forces behind local interest in increased storage capacity.

And while the Amador County Transportation Commission has no official position on global warming, Executive Director Charles Field said the commission is discussing a number of related policies, such as walkable communities and increased transit options.

"If we can't afford to build bypasses and highway widenings, what other alternatives are there?" he said Wednesday. "It's parallel to the global warming issue in that it gets people out of their cars."

Field added that the county has to comply with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency emission standards or else risk losing federal transportation funding, meaning the county's position on global warming may not be as important as its efforts to offset it.

These efforts don't account for whatever impacts will be felt as a result of the governor's climate change legislation.

Haggerty has since approached Travis about bringing his presentation to the Amador County Board of Supervisors, though neither man has yet pitched the idea to the county.

"I would be open to it," Novelli said of the prospect.

Though the presentation explains climate change impacts like salt water intrusion into the delta and intensifying wild fire seasons, which would be directly applicable to a forested county like Amador, Travis admits it may not have the same effect it's had in the Bay Area.

"I have to admit. I have a beard and I live in Berkeley, so I might be even less well received than Al Gore," he joked.