

Lake County part of cool counties' to address global warming

By Tiffany Revelle -- Staff Reporter

Lake County Record-Bee

Article Launched: 09/03/2007 10:53:36 PM PDT

LAKE COUNTY -- "Global climate change has been called by some the crisis of our generation," said Supervisor Denise Rushing in her remarks to the Board of Supervisors Tuesday. "I believe this is the culminating crisis of all generations and is the most critical of the crises we face, but there are others," she said.

She urged the board to join 12 California counties in signing the U.S. Cool Counties Climate Stabilization Declaration. And that's just what it did in a 4 1 vote, with Supervisor Rob Brown in dissent.

The initiative aims to reduce countywide greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent below current levels by 2050, which translates to "an achievable average" of two percent annually, according to a letter to the board from Alameda County Supervisor Scott Haggerty.

He spearheaded the effort in California, inviting its 57 counties to join the campaign and make California the first to have all of its counties sign the declaration. "As California's county leaders, we have a unique opportunity to guide the direction of climate mitigation and adaptation measures if we assert our leadership now," writes Haggerty.

Among other goals, the effort also aspires to urge the federal government to follow suit with the goal of 80 percent less greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, "the level scientists agree is necessary to prevent catastrophic effects on human civilization," according to the letter.

An Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Emission Scenarios (SRES) says that by the end of the 21st century, Earth could expect to see carbon dioxide concentrations in its atmosphere of anywhere from 490 to 1260 parts per million. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), that would be seven to 350 percent above the pre-industrial concentration of 280 parts per million.

The NOAA goes on to state that global surface temperatures are in a warming trend and sea levels are rising. For more information, go to www.ncdc.noaa.gov.

"We are taking literally billions of years of ancient sunlight that's plants, animals that have created oil and have spewed half of it into the atmosphere in a period of two centuries," said Rushing in her remarks to her fellow supervisors.

" And we are not slowing, even though we are already seeing the consequences today, and the consequences will be most profound for our descendents our children's children. And their children's children."

King County, Washington initiated the nationwide movement, whose goal is to get all 3,066 counties across the nation to join the effort.

There was no disagreement among the Lake County Board of Supervisors over the current generation's responsibility to the next. But the decision to sign the declaration didn't come without debate.

Supervisor Brown questioned whether or not Lake County could comply with the initiative's goals, given recent "green" measures the board has already taken. He pointed to the county's recent decision to explore alternative energy, including solar, at existing and new government buildings.

Supervisor Jeff Smith touted the county's status of having the cleanest air in the state and third cleanest in the nation, saying the urban counties that initiated the effort would be hard-pressed to match Lake County.

Supervisor Ed Robey expressed his support for the initiative by quoting former Dist. 2 Supervisor Carl Larson. "If we wait for change to come from the top we'd still be part of the British Empire," quoted Robey.

Brown called the effort a "feel-good-group-hug," adding that hard, scientific data about Lake County's current greenhouse emissions levels and ability to comply with the initiative was needed.

County resident Jeff Bettencort spoke to the board of his experience in Greenland, where he said he'd visited the icecap and seen gushing rivers of melting snow along with pieces "the size of Safeway" falling off.

Sierra Club Lake Group Chair Victoria Brandon spoke in favor of the initiative, saying the board needed to "demonstrate to the people that the county government is willing to take the lead."

Rushing also encouraged individual action, such as asking oneself, "How many trees must I plant each year just to take the carbon out of the air that are the result of my lifestyle and my decisions?"

Contact Tiffany Reville at treville@record-bee.com.