

The Union

Rural Counties board holds June meeting in Nevada City

<http://www.theunion.com/news/11799532-113/beason-fire-nevada-county>

June 13, 2014



Officials from 34 counties came to Gold Country this week when the Rural County Representatives of California held their board meeting at the Miners Foundry in Nevada City Thursday morning. District 1 Supervisor Nate Beason, chair of the RCRC, said the group also toured several institutions important to the local economy.

“We took them down to see the tech companies, and we’ve shown them the future of Nevada County,” Beason said just after a tour of the Empire Mine State Park on Wednesday afternoon.

“Now we’re showing them the history of Nevada County,” Beason said.

Much of Thursday’s meeting dealt with informational updates on legislative items coming out of Sacramento that are likely to affect rural counties like our own. A vast array of topics were covered as those in attendance worked their way through the 161-page agenda and its 69-page supplemental documentation.

“I hope that looking at that agenda and listening to some of the things we were talking about gives you an appreciation for the number of issues RCRC is dealing with on a regular basis,” Beason said.

“We have 9 percent of the people and 50 percent of the real estate in California,” he added. “RCRC’s representation is important because we don’t have a lot of representation in the legislature.”

For Beason, one of the top issues currently facing rural counties is something called “payment in lieu of taxes,” a system designed to reimburse local governments for adverse impacts on the property tax base when the state acquires private lands for wildlife management.

“The state has not reimbursed us in 10 years,” Beason said.

“They owe 36 counties \$22 million, and RCRC has been lobbying on this issue really hard now for quite some time and we keep getting the runaround from Fish and Wildlife,” he added.

Beason estimates that Nevada County’s chunk of that \$22 million comes to roughly \$250,000.

“That’s money that would go into our general fund, it would be discretionary for us to use in all kinds of services,” Beason said. “If we get the money, we’ll consider it a windfall at this point, but they owe it to us.”

Water regulations were discussed, with particular focus on the regulation of groundwater. A proposal from the Brown administration would expand the authority of local agencies to help implement effective groundwater management.

Those authorities include the power to regulate groundwater pumping and the power to establish a system for the registration or permitting of wells. Local agencies would also have the power to establish requirements for monitoring groundwater extraction.

If passed, the proposal would also establish financial penalties for those who violate the new regulations.

The RCRC meeting included a presentation on statewide preparation for fire season from Cal Fire director Ken Pimlott. As the state’s wildland firefighter, Pimlott gave a bird’s-eye view of steps taken to ensure Cal Fire’s ability to provide for the safety of property and people.

Those include adding one additional air tanker, adding a firefighter position to a third of the engine crews around the state, and adding a total of seven engines statewide. Two of those engines will be stationed nearby.

“We’re putting two fire engines into the Tahoe basin along with some administrative staff to support all the activities that Cal Fire does in those areas,” Pimlott said.

Beason said Cal Fire is doing a pretty good job on fire suppression, but he’d like to see more funding for prevention efforts, especially due to the controversial and unpopular SRA fee charged to rural property owners to fund fire prevention.

“We’ve got all our constituents paying this fire fee and we’re still waiting to see some money hit the ground for fire prevention,” Beason said.

To contact Staff Writer Dave Brooksher, email dbrooksher@theunion.com or call 530-477-4230.