

Fire fee for rural areas could be repealed

Placer County Supervisor Jim Holmes testified last week at a regulatory hearing before the California Board of Forestry in Redding.

The hearing was held to receive public comment on the implementation of a “fire fee” on structures located in State Responsibility Areas – areas where the state has firefighting responsibilities.

The annual fee would be up to \$150 per structure for lands within the SRA and could affect about 800,000 property owners and 31 million acres throughout the state, including rural land in Placer and El Dorado counties. The fee originated in a state budget trailer bill for fiscal year 2011-12 and imposed the fee on all habitable structures within the SRA. The fee could raise as much as \$85 million annually.

Holmes, representing the state’s rural counties as a representative of the Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC), spoke at the hearing.

“RCRC has numerous concerns with the law, as we have continuously stated throughout the legislative and regulatory process,” said Holmes. “We opposed SRA fees when first introduced several years ago on the grounds they were bad public policy, and they were repealed as a result of legal action. SRA fees remain a bad idea and we remain opposed.”

The fee has been controversial since it was first enacted and many of those opposed say the fees are unfair because residents pay local taxes for fire protection, on top of services provided by CalFire. Prior to the Redding hearing, the Forestry Board was in San Diego in June to receive comment on the fee. The board’s temporary implementation of the fee is

set to expire in late July, and the board may start a new 45-day comment period on making the fee permanent. In addition, there is pending legislation in the Assembly that would repeal the fee entirely.