

The Foothills Sun- Gazette

Filmmakers document drought in Tulare County

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The only thing mirroring the size and scope of California's drought is the amount of attention it has been getting. During the Tuesday, July 28 meeting of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, cameramen and producers were

present to document the plight of drought stricken community members west of Tulare.

Residents from the community of Oakieville also known as Highland Acres arrived to speak to the board about the help they need to keep their household wells functioning by drilling them deeper. Oakieville resides between Road 46 and Road 48 along highway 137 approximately five miles west of Tulare. The entire community comprises nearly 90 homes.

The agenda item Oakieville residents were Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Utilities Service application. The application would be filed under the Emergency Community Water Assistance grant worth \$500,000 to alleviate drought-related well problems that are currently affecting these residents.

Maria Herrera from Self Help Enterprises addressed the board to make special note of how dire the drought is, more so in Tulare County.

"Tulare County is ground zero for the drought and it has affected the more vulnerable communities like Oakieville that are reliant on private wells," said Herrera. "We might be able to get these people through this drought but what about the next drought?"

Like residents from other communities the stories of drought create a stirring of emotion. One resident has moved from family member to family member trying to escape the clutches of dry wells, all the while attempting to save enough money to extend his well to an appropriate depth. Other residents like Maria Martin are worried about their well depth as the drought continues on.

"I've been living in the community for 17 years and never have I seen the water situation be so dire as it is now," said Maria Martin "I'm one of the lucky ones who still has water and that's only because I invested money last year to drill it deeper but based on how things are going I'll be lucky if that'll last me for the next year."

The film crew documenting the meeting was recording footage for the Emmy-winning documentary series "Years of Living Dangerously." The series depicts the causes, effects, and impacts of global warming but takes special consideration of droughts all around the United States and other countries.

Produced by National Geographic the series seeks firsthand accounts of the impact the drought is having on residents. That not only includes their search for water but the local economy as well. Because Tulare County is an agriculturally based economy the series found the plight of Oakieville to be particularly keen.

In another episode from the series first season, camera crews and concerned advocates visited places like Texas where their drought has wreaked havoc on their fragile local economies. One such incident was a small town that was reliant upon cows. For those who were working in the industry, which seemingly made up a large portion of the community, found themselves out of work. The mass layoffs had a harsh ripple effect throughout the city driving it deeper into an economic hole.

The docu-series episode will air in the fall of 2016 on ShowTime. As well the series first season can be viewed on Netflix in its entirety.