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SUSTAINABLE KERN RIVER COALITION LAUNCHES TO PROTECT AND MAINTAIN KERN RIVER WATER SUPPLY FOR FAMILIES, FARMERS AND COMMUNITIES

As Drought Reduces Annual Kern River Water Supply, Long-Standing Kern River Water Users, Community Members and Businesses Promote Responsible Stewardship and Collaborative Solutions

KERN COUNTY, CA – Today, a network of Kern River water users, community members and business interests launched the [Sustainable Kern River Coalition](#) to protect the Kern River water supply for the people, farms, businesses and disadvantaged communities that depend on it. As extended drought has reduced the Kern River water supply over time, it is incumbent on all water users to work together to sustainably manage the highly variable Kern River. In this pursuit, the Sustainable Kern River Coalition has convened as a forum for regional water users to protect their historic water rights to meet ongoing community needs while also collaborating to develop sustainable water management solutions.

“The Sustainable Kern River Coalition is an opportunity for North Kern and other water users to work together on collaborative solutions to make the most of the Kern River’s limited water supplies,” **said David Hampton, General Manager of the North Kern Water Storage District.** “With concerns over future decline of Kern River water supplies and droughts that are only getting longer and more intense, we recognize the need for a more sustainable approach. We helped form the Sustainable Kern River Coalition because the fact is, there’s not enough water to go around. Before we ask more of the hardworking Kern River, let’s put our heads together to develop proactive solutions that will make the most of our highly variable water supply.”

As environmental organizations and community groups call for running water down the Kern River channel through a portion of Bakersfield, the Coalition urges all stakeholders to seriously consider the trade-offs required to divert an already over-tapped, limited Kern River water supply. Currently, [89% of Kern County is experiencing exceptional drought conditions](#), and running water further into the City would come at the expense of other historic beneficial uses, such as agriculture, support for disadvantaged communities, habitat for fish, environmental restoration, groundwater recharge and recreation – all of which will be at risk of disruption if water supplies are not protected.

“For decades, North Kern has managed the Kern River water supply for our agricultural water users. Farmers always have been – and always will be – the

foundation of Kern County's economy," **continued Hampton**. "Together through the Sustainable Kern River Coalition, we can promote sustainable water management solutions to reasonably meet our region's water needs without negatively impacting Kern County's [\\$7.6 billion agricultural economy, which provides one in five Kern County jobs](#). We look forward to collaborating to ensure a secure water future for our homes, farms and businesses."

Reliable access to Kern River water is vital to the economic prosperity and well-being of Kern County's communities, and this need is even more pronounced in small town disadvantaged communities, such as Shafter and Wasco.

"For the residents of Wasco, the Kern River truly is the lifeblood of our community and surrounding agricultural land. We rely on Kern River water to support Kern County's nation-leading agricultural economy, which employs about [one-third of all Wasco residents](#)," said **Scott Hurlbert, Wasco City Manager**.

"We have worked for years to improve the quality of life here in Shafter through strong economic development and responsible growth, while at the same time working to address the health of both our environment and the people who call Shafter home," said **Gabriel Gonzalez, Shafter City Manager**. "That's why we elected to collaborate with the Sustainable Kern River Coalition. Extended drought has diminished our water supply and we must adhere to our region's historic water rights structure to allocate our limited Kern River water where community needs are greatest."

Kern River water also supports the recreational opportunities we have all come to know and love at Lake Isabella, Lake Ming, Buena Vista Lake and Hart Park. From fishing to whitewater rafting to boating and kayaking with friends and family along the Kern River, the businesses that make these opportunities possible are key contributors to our tourism economy that provides [23,000 local jobs](#) and about [\\$5.6 million in wages](#) annually.

"Water-based outdoor recreation on the river and the lake is vital for Kern County tourism", said **Tom Moore, Owner of Sierra South, Inc., Kernville, CA** – a family-run water sports business, operating on the Upper and Lower Kern River since 1985. "Upper Kern River water supplies storage in Lake Isabella. Our business on the Lower Kern River depends on a seasonal release of the Kern River water supply. If ill-timed running of water through the Lower River means low levels in Lake Isabella, that means less recreating, fishing, whitewater rafting/kayaking and boating during the important summer months – a tremendous cultural and economic loss for the Kern River Valley. With the soon-to-be completed seismic improvements on Isabella Dam, Isabella Lake can be filled to capacity once again. A full lake in the spring will help during drought years. We appreciate the opportunity to work with other water users to advocate for protecting the Kern River water supply that our business and our industry depend on."

For more information about the [Sustainable Kern River Coalition](#), please visit our website at: [SustainableKernRiver.org](#) and review our [Fact Sheet](#) calling for collaborative action to sustainably manage our limited Kern River water supply.

Additionally, individuals or organizations that wish to join the Coalition or to subscribe for additional information can do so through the [contact/sign-up page](#).

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About the Sustainable Kern River Coalition:

The Sustainable Kern River Coalition is a regional group of water users, community members and business interests who are committed to protecting and maintaining the rights and access to Kern River water that support the families, farmers, small businesses and disadvantaged communities who are the backbone of Kern County's economy.