



California Sportfishing  
Protection Alliance

"An Advocate for Fisheries, Habitat and Water Quality"

For Immediate Release, July 2, 2010

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### **Suit Filed to Reverse One of the Biggest Ripoffs in California History: Groups Seek Return of Kern Water Bank to Public Control**

BAKERSFIELD, *Calif.*— A coalition of farmers, sportfishing interests and environmentalists filed suit today seeking to have the Kern Water Bank returned to state control. The water bank, a massive underground reservoir in Kern County built by the state's Department of Water Resources, was illegally gifted to powerful corporate agribusiness interests and real-estate speculators as part of the controversial "Monterey Plus Amendments" to the State Water Project system.

"The Kern Water Bank is an integral part of our State Water Project and crucial to the future health of our farms, our cities and our environment," said Adam Keats, urban wildlands program director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "It was built and paid for by the people of California and should remain the property of the people of California, not handed over to a small group of powerful private interests."

California's state constitution expressly forbids any agency giving away or "gifting" of state assets to private interests. The current lawsuit asserts that the Kern County Water Agency gifted the Kern Water Bank to the Kern Water Bank Authority, a public-private joint powers authority controlled by Paramount Farming Company (one of the world's largest agricultural and holding companies) and Tejon Ranch Company (the massive landholding corporation seeking to develop several new cities north of Los Angeles — including the largest development ever proposed in California).

The suit is the coalition's second in the last month over the State Water Project. The first targeted the Department of Water Resources for approving the Monterey Plus Amendments — a huge set of structural changes for how the State Water Project is managed. In one of those changes, the department transferred the Kern Water Bank to an entity called the Kern County Water Agency. That agency then quickly handed over the water bank to the newly formed Kern Water Bank Authority. The latest suit seeks to bring the Kern Water Bank back into state control.

"We're not going to stand aside and allow a few very powerful and wealthy water barons to illegally privatize a publicly funded facility worth hundreds of millions of dollars so they can reap vast profits from growing nut trees in the desert and building thousands of speculative McMansions in the wilderness," said Bill Jennings, executive director of the

California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. “All while our rivers and streams are dewatered, farms fallowed, and fish and wildlife plunge toward extinction.”

The sportfishing and environmental groups are joined in the suit by two delta water agencies, the Central Delta Water Agency and the Southern Delta Water Agency, whose constituents are dependent on in-delta flows to irrigate their farms.

“A properly managed Kern Water Bank could benefit the entire state, providing backup water during drought years for farms and urban areas, while helping to ensure that water is available to keep the Delta ecosystem healthy,” said Carolee Krieger, executive director of the California Water Impact Network. “But instead, as a result of this giveaway, both the State Water Project and the Delta ecosystem are on the brink of destruction while the water barons hoard water they don’t own and use it for their own maximum profits, no matter what the consequences.”

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*For more information on the Monterey Plus Amendments, see*  
<http://www.c-win.org/press-room-monterey-plus-amendments-and-environmental-impact-report-lawsuit.html>

and

[http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/monterey\\_plus\\_amendments/index.html](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/monterey_plus_amendments/index.html).

*The California Water Impact Network promotes the equitable and environmental use of California's water, including instream uses, through research, planning, public education, and litigation. [www.c-win.org](http://www.c-win.org)*

*California Sportfishing Protection Alliance is a nonprofit conservation and research organization established in 1983 for the purpose of conserving, restoring, and enhancing the state's water quality and fishery resources and their aquatic and riparian ecosystems. [www.calsport.org](http://www.calsport.org)*

*The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 255,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places. [www.biologicaldiversity.org](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org)*