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Currents: Victories and Threats



Shasta Reservoir at 32% capacity in October 2022. Credit: DWR.

Some Dam Projects Stumble, Some Fall

There's an unusual amount of news on California dams this month (some good news, or at least an opportunity for "*I told you so*" commentary), so put on your reading glasses and buckle up! We start this article with a brief history of dam building slush funds, and then describe a series of stumbles by proposed dams in the state. Sometimes we have a little to celebrate, though there is always more work to be done. [Read more.](#)

HAPPY LAST NEW WATER YEAR, DELTA SMELT?

State and federal agencies cancel action to protect Delta's most endangered fish -- and seek to weaken protections for others in peril

In California, October 1 marks the start of the new “water year,” the date water managers use to mark the end of the dry season and the beginning of the wet. The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) are kicking off this new water year by cancelling the fall flow protection for Delta Smelt — once one of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta's most common fish — and now its rarest...

[Read the press release.](#)



Delta Smelt. Credit: CA Dept. of Water Resources.

The Kern River is the Heart of Bakersfield – But It Needs Some Love

It's hard to believe that it could happen in the year 2024, but earlier this month the City of Bakersfield turned off the Kern River, causing a massive fish die off. The river shutoff was ostensibly to do maintenance in the river channel and to save the water for future supply needs.

“People who care about their rivers would never do this,” said attorney Adam Keats, who represents Bring Back the Kern, one of the local groups working to restore the river...

[Read more.](#)



The Kern River on January 31, 2024, when the river was flowing.



Credit: ACE Public Media (public domain).

Army Corps of Engineers Listens to FOR

On Monday, September 16, the State Water Resources Control Board “denied without prejudice” the federal Clean Water Act water quality certification (401 permit) for the Sites Reservoir.

In April, Friends of the River and other environmental organizations submitted extensive comments to the USACE on the Sites Authority's 401

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Proposition 4 on the November statewide ballot

The citizens of California will have the chance to vote on the “Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024.”

The Friends of the River board of directors reviewed the bond, liked what it saw, and by a significant majority vote, voted to support the bond.

The board was not happy about \$91015 of the bond, effectively adding another \$75 million to the California Water Bond of 2014 water storage project subsidies. This section was probably created to give the state’s powerful water lobby something tangible to show their influence, but those bucks aren’t going to make much difference spread out among the often Water Bond billion-dollar-plus storage projects.

So, on balance, it’s a thumbs up from Friends of the River.



The American River, Jim Jones.



Assemblymember Bauer-Kahan. Credit: Public Domain.

River Protection Bill Signed Into Law

On Sunday, September 22, 2024, Governor Newsom announced that he signed Assembly Bill 460 (AB 460) by Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan (D-Orinda) into law.

This bill will allow the state to impose serious fines on those who steal water. This legislation came in response to a dramatic decision by Shasta River water users to ignore state orders and instead drain the Shasta River in August 2022, stating on record, "To hell with it. We're starting the pumps." AB 460 is a major win for rivers, as it gives more teeth to regulators to prevent rivers from running dry. Friends of the River has formally supported AB 460 since March 2023.

[Read more from The Hill.](#)

[Read All September Currents Articles](#)

FOR In the News

Failure to implement environmental laws shows what’s really in store for the endangered San Francisco Bay-Delta ecosystem (Maven’s

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Earlier this year, two eminent fish researchers [wrote](#) “California ... is a world leader in having its [endemic](#) freshwater fishes likely to be driven to extinction by the end of the century.” We know the reason. California habitually fails to enforce environmental laws designed to protect our aquatic ecosystems. Following the state’s lead, federal agencies skimp on environmental safeguards and waive the meager protections they do offer any time protecting the public’s fish, wildlife, waterways, and water quality, gets in the way of diverting more water to meet California’s seemingly unquenchable demand...

[Read more of this OpEd in Maven's Notebook by Gary Bobker of Friends of the River, and Jon Rosenfield of San Francisco Baykeeper](#)

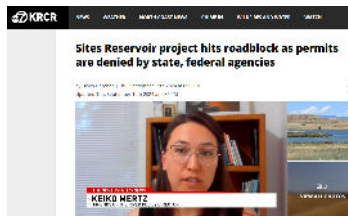


Delta waterway. Credit: Paul Harnes for CA Dept. of Water Resources

Sites Reservoir project hits roadblock as permits are denied by state, federal agencies (KRCR Chico)

Friends of the River's Keiko Mertz shared with a Chico news station that there are ongoing issues with Clean Water Act water quality compliance for Sites Reservoir - especially information gaps related to endangered species and environmental mitigation.

[Watch here.](#)



Keiko Mertz, Policy Director, speaks about issues with Sites Reservoir Clean Water Act permitting.

Opportunities

Headwaters - Accepting Submissions

Friends of the River's *Headwaters Magazine* is a beautiful repository of articles about rivers and river recreation, opinion pieces, policy analysis, river news, art, photographs, and more.

We welcome submissions of articles that speak to the six areas in which we work for the protection of California's rivers. These areas are hydropower reform, saving and storing water, restoring flows, flood management, legal and regulatory protections, and inspiring citizen action. We also welcome submissions of visual art, creative writing, poetry, and photos that are centered around rivers and nature more broadly.

Not sure what to submit? Let's work together. More info [here](#). Please email keiko@friendsoftheriver.org to discuss a submission.

Please Donate

Please consider a generous gift to help FOR fight the Triple Threat to Rivers. This will be a critical year to stop Sites Reservoir, the Delta Tunnel and the Voluntary Agreements.

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