



Sustainable Kern River

Newsletter | August 2023



Lake Isabella at Highest Level in 15 Years!

Lake Isabella Rises to 540,500 AF as Summer Heat Draws Locals and Tourists Alike to the Recreation Destination



Local Lake Isabella business owner, Philip Watrous of Fun in the Sun Lake Isabella, shoots quick self-shot video about what a full Lake Isabella means for his business and the local community.

[Click Here to Watch Video](#)

From the snow-capped peaks of Mt. Whitney down the forks of the Kern River, winding through the Wild & Scenic Kern River of the Sequoia National Park & Forest, the waters of the Kern River make Lake Isabella possible. And after completing the Isabella Dam Safety Modification Project last year, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) just gave Lake Isabella Dam the green light to return to unrestricted operations in July – updating the dam’s risk level from “highest urgency and risk” to “low urgency.”

“Isabella Lake currently has more than 540,500 acre-feet of water — about 95 percent of its 568,100 acre-feet capacity, also known as gross pool. That number also makes the lake about 50 percent fuller than it’s been allowed since 2006 when USACE implemented an operating restriction of 361,000 acre-feet.” – from a [USACE Press Release dated July 20, 2023](#).

Lake Isabella is a national recreation destination and a gateway to the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Whether it’s whitewater rafting, camping, boating, kayaking, fishing, swimming, or family picnics, Lake Isabella is a local gem and a key contributor to the county’s [\\$1.6 billion tourism, recreation and entertainment economy](#).

All that fun in the sun is made possible by local Lake Isabella area businesses that depend on adequate lake levels to support these outdoor activities. To celebrate the occasion, the Sustainable Kern River Coalition spoke with residents and business owners around Lake Isabella about what a full lake means to them. Here’s what they had to say:

“I have memories of seeing the lake full as a kid and loving it...a full lake means camaraderie, it means community, and it means revenue for our community.” - [Fun in the Sun Lake Isabella](#)

“The lake being as full as it is great because people come up here to view the lake and enjoy the lake for recreation. There’s a lot of traffic on the lake and a lot of traffic coming by for lunch.” - [Red’s Marina & Deli](#)

“The increased lake levels have been incredibly beneficial to me – since the river has been moving too fast for rafting, I can refer families to go boating on the lake.” - [Kern River Sequoia RV Resort at Camp James](#)

“The higher lake level is good for us.” - [Kernville Inn](#)

Kern County Water Monitor

There is no shortage of media coverage when it comes to California water. Finding the most relevant articles to better understand how current weather conditions, groundwater management, irrigation efficiency and so many other issues stand to impact water availability in Kern County can be a daunting task. SKRC continues to monitor the wide range of voices weighing in on these subjects and more through our “Kern County Water Monitor.” We pulled out just a couple of the articles that we found particularly noteworthy to share with you.

Kern River to get a new Watermaster, but one with a familiar name

By: Lois Henry, SJV Water
August 24, 2023

“Art Chianello will step in as the new Kern River Watermaster at the start of the new water year, which is Oct. 1.

In his new role, he will review river records as kept by the city and work as the liaison between the Army Corps of Engineers, which owns and operates Lake Isabella, and the Kern River ‘interests,’ those entities with water rights on the river. Kern River interests include, Bakersfield, the Kern County Water Agency, Kern Delta Water District and the Buena Vista and North Kern water storage Districts.”



Hilary dumps up to 4 inches on Kern, closes Highway 58 and forces San Canyon evacuation order

By: John Cox, Bakersfield Californian
August 20, 2023

“Flash floods struck across Kern on Sunday as Tropical Storm Hilary dumped as much as 4 inches of rain in some parts of the county, closing a stretch of Highway 58 and prompting an evacuation order for Sand Canyon near Tehachapi.

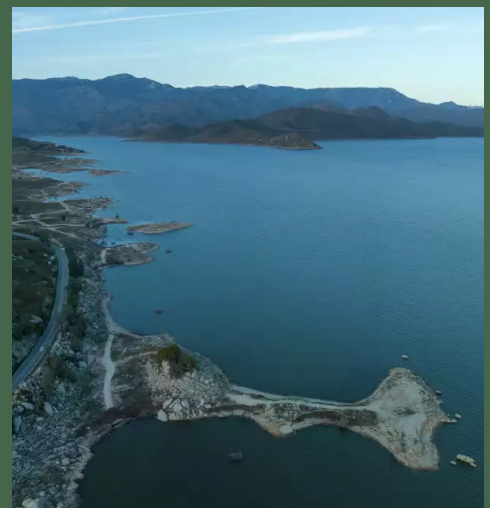
Warnings went out throughout the day calling on people to seek higher ground and avoid driving or walking through flood waters. There were no reports of injuries.”

Ghost town disappears as California lake fills for first time in years

By: Katie Dowd, SFGATE
July 16, 2023

“A Wild West ghost town has submerged back into the deep as California’s once-dry [Lake Isabella](#) fills up for the first time in years.

Until recently, the lake in the southern Sierra Nevada foothills in Central California was emblematic of California’s drought. In September, it was at 8% capacity, [revealing the town of Whiskey Flat](#). Whiskey Flat was founded in the 1860s as the Gold Rush was tapering off. A nearby mine — Whiskey Flat is about 35 miles from Bakersfield — was in operation until the 1940s and yielded millions in gold. A new type of California gold rush came to town next: Hollywood.”



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Stay part of the conversation on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SustainTheKern>.

While the SKRC will continue to release regular newsletters, following the SKRC Twitter account is a great way to receive even more of our commentary and engage with us on the most recent Kern River water stories as they happen in real time.

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. If you or your organization is interested in joining the Sustainable Kern River Coalition, or in receiving additional information, contact us at info@sustainablekernriver.org.

