

State Water Resources Control Board Division of Water Rights
Attn: Mitchell Moody
P.O. Box 2000
Sacramento, CA 95812-2000
mitchell.moody@waterboards.ca.gov

Re: Petition of Semitropic Water Storage District to Revoke and/or Revise the Declaration that the Kings River is a Fully Appropriated Stream System and Proposed Application to Appropriate Kings River Water

Dear Chairman Esquivel and Honorable Board Members:

On behalf of the Central Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CKGSA) and its Board of Directors, I write in strong **opposition** to Semitropic Water Storage District's (Semitropic) Petition to Revise the Fully Appropriated Stream Status of the Kings River (FAS) and its proposed Application to Appropriate Kings River water.

CKGSA was formed to comply with the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and will soon finalize a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) which details how CKGSA will ensure the sustainability of groundwater within its boundaries and meet the requirements of SGMA. The most critical aspect of the GSP is use and recharge of wet year Kings River water flows accessed through a partnership with Consolidated Irrigation District (CID). CID holds rights to Kings River water and has been exercising those rights since 1876. Within CKGSA, the Kings River is the primary source of water for 150,000 acres of farmland and is used to recharge the underlying aquifer tapped by five cities and two unincorporated communities. These disadvantaged communities (DACs) utilize the recharged water for drinking and municipal purposes.

Semitropic's FAS petition is submitted in an attempt to secure a right to divert Kings River waters for use in Kern County – outside the watershed of origin. The Kings River is the primary surface water source to the communities within the three counties that comprise the watershed of origin: Fresno, Kings, and Tulare Counties. Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) throughout those counties are now engaged in the process of addressing groundwater sustainability, and use of Kings River high water flows is a crucial element of those sustainability efforts.

Public comments submitted on the Semitropic Project establish that historic Kings River flood flows are less than the anticipated groundwater overdraft in Fresno, Kings, and Tulare Counties. We are aware that planning efforts at various levels of regional and local government are underway to fully utilize Kings River flood flows for addressing SGMA impacts and anticipated growth. It only makes sense that Kings River water should be available to meet these needs within the watershed of origin.

The Semitropic Project seeks to divert Kings River flood flows out of the watershed. By exporting water from critically overdrafted groundwater basins, the Semitropic project would significantly impair the ability of the regional GSAs (including CKGSA) to comply with SGMA without resorting to removing significant lands from production and limiting urban growth. The Semitropic Project would negatively impact the lives and livelihoods of many people in Fresno, Kings, and Tulare Counties who depend on Kings River waters.

California is the first state in the nation to enact a law recognizing that “every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable and accessible water” – also known as “the human right to water.” The Kings River service area includes 51 “Disadvantaged Communities” – areas which most suffer from a combination of economic, health, and environmental burdens – with a population of 646,236. In addition, the area includes 59 “Severely Disadvantaged Communities” with a population of 84,510. In all, 69 percent of the population that relies upon Kings and Tulare groundwater basins lives in a Disadvantaged Community or Severely Disadvantaged Community.

The Semitropic Project has the potential to deprive DACs of access to water and jeopardize long-term regional/local sustainability. DACs already disproportionately suffer from poverty, high unemployment, asthma and heart disease, as well as air and water pollution, ~~and~~ ~~the~~ Semitropic Project will only make already-difficult circumstances worse and threaten “the human right to water.”

Further, contrary to Semitropic’s claims, the Project neither reduces nor eliminates flood risk. Rather, it increases the potential for flooding on the South Fork Kings River.

For these stated reasons and more, CKGSA respectfully requests that the State Water Resources Control Board deny Semitropic’s FAS petition. The Semitropic FAS petition and Project are not in the public interest. Instead, the Project would only harm groundwater sustainability efforts, and threaten access to safe, clean, affordable and accessible water.

Sincerely,

Phillip G. Desatoff
Central Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency