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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Drought Cuts Kings Runoff Hopes

**D**EEPENING DROUGHT CONDITIONS have guaranteed that Kings River water agencies and users will experience a much below average water year and almost certainly critically dry conditions during the upcoming water delivery season. Kings River Watermaster Steve Haugen said the California Department of Water Resources now expects the “most probable” total runoff during the peak April-through-July period to be only 38% of average, or 470,000 acre-feet.

Each recent week’s updated runoff forecast has shown a decline because they assume normal amounts of rain and snow will occur “but the few storms we had in March and thus far in April were well below average,” Haugen said. “The forecasts keep coming in drier and drier.”

The DWR’s most recent forecast, released Wednesday (April 11), is based upon results of the April 1 California Cooperative Snow Survey, in which the KRWA participates, as well as more recent readings from automated snow sensors.

“There was not a great deal of snow for survey teams to measure, even though April 1 is the traditional snow depth and water content peak for the year,” Haugen said. “There was a great deal of bare ground showing.”

Overall Kings River snowpack water content on April 1 was just 42% of average, Haugen said, but has since declined steadily despite a storm that brought light precipitation to the watershed Wednesday.

If no further significant precipitation were to occur, the DWR’s forecasters caution that Kings River runoff could be as little as 320,000 acre-feet, or 26% of average. That total, if realized, would be uncomfortably close to the Kings River’s all-time April-July runoff record low of 22.44% in 1923-24. That water year was the Kings’ driest on record at 22.84% of average. “This year has the potential to become the fourth or fifth driest on record,” Haugen said.

That is bad news for the 28 Kings River water agencies and the growers they serve within the nearly one million acres irrigated with Kings water in parts of Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties. Those agencies’ entitlements are determined by a water schedule based upon each day’s natural river flow.

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“A lot less snow means much less runoff and a great deal less entitlement for each of our member units,” Haugen said. Several Kings River units may lack having enough water to operate and all water runs that can occur are expected to be much shorter than usual. “At this point it doesn’t look very promising,” said Haugen.

When and where surface water is not available, groundwater pumping will generally be the tool used by farmers to meet water needs of plants, tree crops and grapevines.

Managers and directors of KRWA’s individual member units, who manage the amount of water stored in Pine Flat Reservoir, are closely monitoring the situation to determine how to best manage their water supplies.

This spring’s conditions stand in sharp contrast to what was being experienced a year ago when a major early April rainstorm, coupled with earlier above-average storm activity, prompted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to order flood releases from Pine Flat Reservoir, which ended up nearly filling. The 2005-06 water year’s Kings River runoff added up to just under 3 million acre-feet, 172% of average, and was the 14<sup>th</sup> largest year on record. The 2004-05 water year was also above average but the previous six water years fell short of normal runoff.