

KERN COUNTY



COUNTY INFORMATION

Size: 8,161 sq. miles (21,137 sq. kilometers)

Population: 661,645 (as of 2000 US Census)

Location: Southern

Official Website: www.co.kern.ca.us/

CONSERVATION STORY

Kern Community Takes a Stand Against Unhealthy Air

In 2006, the American Lung Association named Kern County the most ozone-polluted county in the nation. The County has consistently violated the federal health based eight-hour and one-hour ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards. ⁽²⁾ Nearby Tulare, Fresno, and Merced ranked fourth, sixth, and seventh, respectively, as most ozone polluted on the American Lung Association's list ⁽¹⁾.

Decomposing dairy manure, livestock feed, and cows' digestive systems emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs.) VOCs react with oxides of nitrogen emitted from cars, trucks, and other combustion sources to form ozone, also known as "smog." According to a December 2001 Ozone Plan by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board, dairy emissions comprise approximately 20-25% of the county's ozone pollution.

Smog is unhealthy for people of all ages, especially children, and according to recent research may be lethal in high doses.¹ Smog can damage lung-tissue, cause and exacerbates asthma, reduce lung capacity, increase respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions, increase school and work absenteeism, and damage crops.

So when yet another mega-dairy with 2,800 cows bought its way into Kern in 2005, residents took it upon themselves to act.

A Kern-based citizen's group named the Association of Irrigated Residents, or AIR, brought the suit against the dairy. They were represented by an environmental litigation non-profit called the Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment. The CRPE's involvement in the AIR's lawsuit was motivated largely by their dedication to protecting the public health of economically and ethnically diverse areas like Kern County. As of the 2000 US Census, approximately 20.8 % of the population was below the poverty line. The most populous ethnicities were white (61.6%), Hispanic (20.8%), and African American (6%). "Without them [CRPE] we wouldn't have been able to afford this," said Tom Frantz of Shafter, a high school teacher and member of AIR. "They covered us pro-bono."

"These are not 'happy cow dairies,'" said Linda MacKay, a Kern County resident from Lebec and a member of AIR. "These factories are huge operations that maximize profits and emit significant amounts of air pollution, which the Court has ruled must be regulated just like any other industry."

On September 25, 2007 U.S. District Court Oliver Wagner ruled that a mega-dairy had violated the Clean Air Act when it was built without an air permit in Kern County. Wagner also ruled that California's "State Implementation Plan," which is the state's strategy to achieve healthy air in the San Joaquin Valley, required the mega-dairy obtain an "authority to construct permit" which it had not yet done. He also ruled that the dairy adopt Best Available Control Technology and to purchase "offsets" or "emission reduction credits."

"This is a significant step towards health in the San Joaquin Valley, because our lungs will no longer be forced to subsidize the dairy industry," said Frantz.

For the AIR and the Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment, the battle is just beginning. While increasingly more attention is paid to recent climate issues such as CO2 emissions, residents of the San Joaquin Valley are standing up for their most basic health rights.

“There are about twenty more dairies being proposed across the valley. We are going to keep fighting them, but it would be a lot easier if the Air District just enforced the policies they already have,” says Frantz.

Residents interested in volunteering with the Association of Irrigated Residents, the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, or to learn about these issues should visit the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition website at www.calcleanair.org. or www.crpe-ej.org.

Citations:

1. http://lungaction.org/reports/sota06_table3b.html
2. <http://www.arb.ca.gov/aqd/OLDozone/A1C15.ht>

ORGANIZATIONS

Antelope Valley Conservancy

Contact Name: Wendy Reed, Director

Address: PO Box 3133, Quartz Hill, CA 93586-0133

Email: avconservancy@yahoo.com

Website: www.avconservancy.org

County: Kern, Los Angeles

Issue Focus: Preservation of habitats, watershed resources, and wildlife corridors

Group Type: California Public Benefit Corporation

Volunteer Opportunities: Land cleanups, educational events, policy analysis, mapping

Accepts Donations: Yes

Public Events: Martin Luther King Jr. Day Sierra Bike Trail Cleanup, Leona Valley Bicycle Fun Ride, Endangered Species Day Conference, Earth Day Cleanups at Sanctuaries and Saddleback State Park.

Description: Antelope Valley Conservancy's mission is to preserve and steward natural lands that provide functional native habitats, watershed resources, community character, and scenic beauty. We accomplish this through land acquisition, implementation of mitigation, scientific studies, collaborative planning and projects, and community education. Our service area focuses on the Antelope-Fremont Valleys Watershed and the upper Santa Clara River Watershed.

Sierra Club – Kern/Kaweah Chapter

Contact Name: Arthur Unger

Address: 2815 La Cresta Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93305-1719

Phone: (661) 323 5569

Email: artunger@att.net

Website: www.sierraclub.org

County: Kern, Kings, Tulare

Issue Focus: All

Volunteer Opportunities: Yes

Accepts Donations: Yes

Public Events: Events are within the chapter.

Description: The Sierra Club's members and supporters are more than 1.3 million of your friends and neighbors. Inspired by nature, we work together to protect our communities and the planet. The Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization.

Sequoia Forestkeepers

Contact Name: Valerie Cassity, Programs Director

Address: PO Box 2134, Kernville, CA 93238

Email: Valerie@sequoiaforestkeeper.org

Website: www.sequoiaforestkeeper.org

County: Kern, Tulare

Issue Focus: Forest management and conservation, wildlife

Group Type:

Volunteer Opportunities: Forest and wildlife monitoring

Accepts Donations: Yes

Public Events: Kern Valley Spring Nature Festival, Kern Valley Autumn and Vulture Festival, Annual SFK Great American Campout, periodic community education programs, Whiskey Flat Days, Earth Day L.A., Earth Day Bakersfield

Description: Sequoia ForestKeeper serves as the eyes, ears, and voice of the Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument through monitoring, enforcement, education, and litigation.

PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND AGENCIES

Kern County Board of Supervisors

Address:

1115 Truxtun Avenue, 5th Floor
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Phone: (661) 868-3601

Email: board@co.kern.ca.us

Website: <http://www.co.kern.ca.us/bos/>

Senate Representative – 18th District

Counties Represented: Kern, Tulare, Inyo and San Bernardino

Website: <http://republican.sen.ca.gov/web/18/pro.asp>