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ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

**A RAFTER** traverses rocks that are usually underwater as the Kern River flows toward Lake Isabella. For residents and businesses, each year is a year closer to the next wet one, but staying afloat hasn't been easy.

## Their rapids response

Rafting firms on depleted Kern River look to ride out drought

BY ROSANNA XIA

BAKERSFIELD — Darron Nilsson navigated his truck down a dirt road to the Kern River. The trail, less traveled this year, opened up to a dusty clearing at the water's edge.

Here, if the snowpack had not amounted to 5% of normal this spring, if the drought hadn't been so unforgiving for three winters, if white-water rafting didn't depend on, well, more water, Nilsson and his staff would be launching hundreds of rafters into the rushing rapids.

Instead, water levels are a 10th of what they could be, and Nilsson had to cancel his rafting season for the first time since he opened shop more than a decade ago.

He could hear the first rapid around the corner — once a roaring "wake-up rapid" to an exciting journey down the Kern. This day, it was a gentle gurgle.

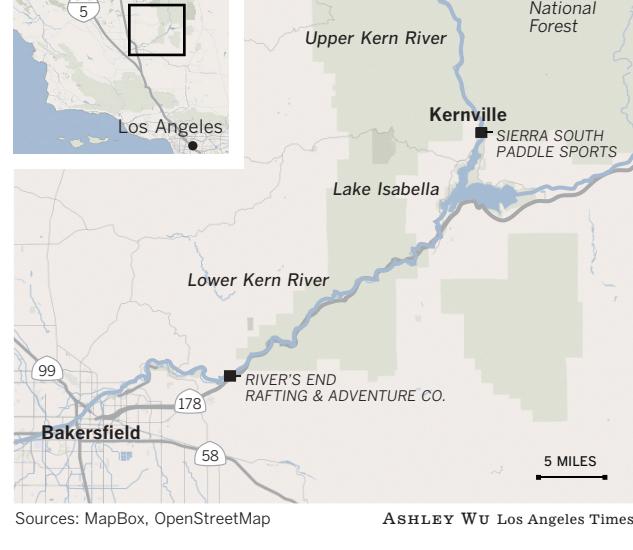
"This is bittersweet," he said. "I haven't been down here all season.... I've been avoiding it."

Dismal snowpack levels in the southern Sierra Nevada have forced rafting companies up and down the 165-mile Kern River to make tough business decisions this year. Some have written off 2015, while others are hanging on with creative business alternatives and fewer workers.

For decades, the mighty Kern — sometimes called the "Killer Kern" — has attracted adventurous visitors to one of the fastest-flowing rivers in the West. The Kern [See Kern, A9]

### Taming the 'Killer Kern'

Water levels on the Kern River this year are a 10<sup>th</sup> of what they could be, hampering some recreational uses.



## VOWS AGAINST GAY MARRIAGE

Confusion reigns in Texas after a top official's defiant statement

BY MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE

HOUSTON — The U.S. Supreme Court decision establishing that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marry has left some state officials grappling with another legal question: Are government employees with conflicting religious beliefs obligated to issue licenses and perform weddings for gay partners?

The issue has come quickly to a boil in Texas, where the state attorney general issued a nonbinding opinion over the weekend suggesting that justices of the peace, judges, county clerks and their employees have a constitutional right of their own to refuse to facili-

tate such marriages, especially when there may be other county employees and judges willing to do the job.

"Texas must speak with one voice against this lawlessness, and act on multiple levels to further protect religious liberties for all Texans, but most immediately do anything we can to help our county clerks and public officials who now are forced with defending their religious beliefs against the court's ruling," Atty. Gen. Ken Paxton said in a separate statement.

Although the Supreme Court found that the right of same-sex couples to marry is enshrined under the due process and equal protection clauses of the 14th Amendment, the attorney general [See Gay marriage, A8]



GIANNIS PAPANIKOS Associated Press

### WITH BANKS CLOSED, ATMs draw lines; withdrawals were capped at \$66.

## Dangers in Greek default

If the EU nation goes broke, the prospect of a return to political instability is a greater peril for its neighbors.

BY CAROL J. WILLIAMS

When recession exposed the glorified pyramid scheme that was Greek government budgeting in 2009, fear of a global economic meltdown on a par with the collapse on Wall Street a

year earlier rippled through international markets.

The budget crisis was eased, but not before a short-lived panic in the financial markets. Now, as Greece once again peers over the precipice of expulsion from the Eurozone common currency club, millions worldwide are wondering what consequences lie ahead for other countries and investors if, as now appears likely, Athens defaults on its bailout debts Tuesday.

Economists and financial strategists seem confident that the world will weather

the latest crisis with minimal long-term disruption.

Thanks to intervention plans crafted by the European Central Bank over the last three years, there are cash reserves for emergency lending to other heavily indebted Eurozone countries and a \$1.2-billion bond-buying fund to protect the most vulnerable in the event that a Greek default sends interest rates from private lenders skyrocketing.

This time around, the greater peril for Greece's neighbors and allies is the

[See Greece, A4]

### Weather

Partly sunny, humid.

L.A. Basin: 89/68. **B8**



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## Despite vote, shift is felt on death penalty

Conservative justices give the go-ahead, but execution opponents take Breyer's dissent as a call to arms.

BY DAVID G. SAVAGE AND TIMOTHY M. PHELPS

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court cleared the way Monday for Oklahoma to continue using a lethal drug cocktail for executions, but, in a surprising dissent, two liberal justices opened the door to what could become a historic challenge to the death penalty itself.

By a 5-4 vote, the court's conservative justices gave Oklahoma, Florida and other death penalty states the go-ahead to administer midazolam, a surgical sedative, as one of the drugs used in lethal injections.

But opponents of the death penalty took heart from a meticulously researched and unusually passionate dissent from Justice Stephen G. Breyer, who openly invited a new constitutional assault on the very foundation of capital punishment.

The death penalty, Breyer wrote, is "unfair, cruel and unusual." Opponents of the ultimate punishment took his words as a call to arms.

"I think this case will be remembered more for that dissent than for the decision itself," said Richard Dieter of the Death Penalty Information Center in Washington. Breyer "has sort of planted a flag for the courts to have a discussion of the death penalty itself. This is going to be a blueprint for saying the country has turned a corner on the death penalty."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg joined Breyer's opinion, and the two other liberal justices dissented strongly from Monday's ruling, giving the campaign to abolish the death penalty its biggest momentum at the high court in nearly four decades.

In 1972 the justices suspended the use of the death penalty, but reinstated it four years later. Monday's dissent marked the first time since the early 1990s that two sitting Supreme Court justices have openly [See Death, A7]

## Brown under pressure on lethal injection

BY MAURA DOLAN

SAN FRANCISCO — The Supreme Court's decision Monday giving a green light to an execution drug triggered a renewed attempt in California to create a single-drug method of lethal injection for inmates on America's largest death row.

Under a legal settlement reached earlier this month, Gov. Jerry Brown's administration agreed to propose a new lethal injection method 120 days after the Supreme Court decided a challenge to a lethal injection drug used in Oklahoma.

The decision came Monday in a 5-4 ruling that upheld the use of the drug, midazolam.

The ruling reiterated that executions need not be painless and required inmates challenging methods to identify available alternatives that posed less risk of severe pain.

Kent Scheidegger, legal director of the pro-death penalty Criminal Justice Legal Foundation, said Monday's ruling would make it more difficult for challengers to block California's new protocol, which is due in late October.

"It is going to be very, very difficult — probably impossible — for anyone to get a 'stay' prohibiting the state from using the new method," Scheidegger said. "The decision was a home run."

Brown's administration agreed to the deadline after Scheidegger's group sued on behalf of crime victims. Court rulings forced the state to revamp its execution plans, and more than three years have passed since Brown ordered prison officials to create a single-drug protocol.

Even with the new deadline, though, many hurdles remain before executions can resume in California.

State law requires extensive public comment on a new execution method, a process that could take a year.

Opponents of the death penalty also might decide to [See Executions, A7]

