# **Judge allows Kern to resume oil permitting**

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**Body**

Nov. 2—A court ruling issued Wednesday allows ***Kern*** government to resume oilfield permitting — a big win for an industry that has seen a significant slowdown in local activity after a local judge identified problems with an extensive environmental assessment undergirding the county's review process.

***Kern*** County Superior Court Judge Gregory A. Pulskamp discharged a writ that in October 2021 removed the county's authority to approve projects and returned it to state officials who local ***oil*** producers complained were taking too long to issue permits.

Pulskamp's finding Wednesday is the latest in a yearslong legal battle between the industry, which bankrolled the county's efforts, and a coalition of environmental and farming interests that promptly pledged an appeal.

"After years of litigation, the court's decision is an important milestone that allows production permitting to resume in ***Kern*** County in a manner that is fully protective of human health and the environment," President and CEO Catherine Reheis-Boyd of the Western States Petroleum Association trade group said in a statement.

A county spokeswoman noted by email staff are "very pleased" with the ruling, adding that more extensive comments will be provided Thursday.

Executive Director Caroline Farrell of the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment said by email it was disappointed the county "insists on moving forward with this misguided fast-track permitting scheme, which prioritizes the ***oil*** industry's interests above residents' health and the welfare of ***Kern*** communities."

She added that the coalition has filed an appeal "to address what we believe are ongoing deficiencies in the county's environmental review, and we will continue to fight to ensure the county follows the law and institutes required protections."

The case dates to the county Board of Supervisors' 2015 approval of a permitting ordinance that streamlines permitting based on a review of impacts ***oil*** and gas production may have on the local environment.

A lawsuit filed by the coalition asserted the review violated the California Environmental Quality Act. After an initial win by the county, an appellate court in 2020 agreed the massive document did not comport with CEQA.

The county responded by making a series of changes to the review, which were then adopted by the board despite outcry from hundreds of industry opponents, many of them living outside ***Kern***.

That action led the county to continue permitting — until Pulskamp ruled a little more than a year ago that the county needed to hold off until the court could judge whether the review complied with CEQA.

Last month, the judge ruled the county did not need to restart and then readopt the entire review after the board signed off on a few somewhat technical changes. Pulskamp's ruling Wednesday essentially found the county had done everything necessary to follow CEQA.

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