



PRESS RELEASE

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Fishable, Swimmable, Drinkable?

California Coastkeeper Alliance and Ventura Coastkeeper Train Local Community Members and Activists to Take the Clean Water Act into Their Own Hands

Ventura, CA - Thirty-eight years after Congress promised fishable, swimmable, drinkable waterways with the passage of the Clean Water Act, too many of California's waterways remain contaminated. Every two years, California must compile a Clean Water Act 303(d) list, which is a list of the water bodies that are too polluted to be safely used for drinking water; or used for fishing, swimming, boating, surfing, aquatic habitat, or the other "beneficial uses" that Californians used to enjoy more widely.

As the 303(d) list of polluted waterways grows longer every year, the goal of restoring the health of waterways for fishing, swimming and drinking seems increasingly out of reach. Three hundred and fifty new water bodies are listed on the 2010 303(d) polluted waters list for the first time because of failing to meet water quality standards for one or more pollutants.

Six of these waterbodies segments are in the Calleguas Creek watershed, which are now listed for trash impairments after data collected by Ventura Coastkeeper's Watershed Monitoring Program and submitted to the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board ("Regional Board") revealed that the creek is too polluted with trash to provide a healthy habitat for fish, wildlife, and recreational uses.

Over the next few months, the State Water Board will finalize the 2010 polluted waters list through regulatory review and collect data for the 2012 list. A comprehensive set of listings are needed more than ever for Ventura County's impaired waterbodies. In the Calleguas Creek Watershed and the Ormond Beach Watershed, excessive nutrients, pesticides, bacteria, trash, and toxic metals pour off of agricultural fields, wash down storm drains, and are discharged from sewage spills, devastating aquatic wildlife and contaminating fish caught by local residents along their way to Mugu Lagoon and the Ormond Beach Wetlands.

The Santa Clara River, the largest free flowing wild river in Southern California, once home to over 8,000 returning adult steelhead, is impaired by barriers to fish passage; excessive diversions reducing flows to levels that do not support the river's aquatic life; trash; nutrient loading that leads to eutrophic conditions and fish kills; toxic industrial and stormwater discharges; inadequately treated discharges from sewage treatment plants; sewage spills; herbicides; and pesticides and salts from irrigation runoff. The Ventura River, also once home to plentiful steelhead and red legged frog populations, is impacted by fish barriers including the impassible Matilija Dam; trash; agricultural discharges of pesticides and nutrients; excessive water diversions and groundwater pumping; sewage treatment plant discharges; unnecessary and

excessive herbicide applications to control weeds and invasive species; and unchecked urban runoff.

A broad spectrum of those who know local waters and beaches best—fishermen and women, surfers, scientists, water activists and advocates—are speaking out for clean water. On May 11, 2010, the California Coastkeeper Alliance and the Wishtoyo Foundation’s Ventura Coastkeeper Program led a discussion at Patagonia’s corporate headquarters on the health of Ventura waterways and beaches. The workshop trained local activists and community members how to both properly collect water quality data from their local waterbodies and how to submit water quality data to inform Regional Board decisions regarding the listing of polluted waterbodies. Furthermore, the workshop informed Ventura County community groups, students, and activists as to how a 303(d) listing provides environmental protection for waterbodies and their species, and provided guidance as to how to submit comment letters to the State Water Board advocating for the adoption of the 350 plus additions to the 2010 303(d) polluted waters list. In attendance, were members of and leaders from the Los Padres Sierra Club, Oxnard’s League of United Latin American Citizens, Friends of the Santa Clara River, Cause, Environmental Defense Center, Pesticide Free Ojai, Ventura Citizens for Hillside Preservation, Environmental Coalition of Ventura County, as well as local college students, and Ventura Coastkeeper stream team volunteers.

In continued support of Ventura County community and group efforts to protect and restore the water quality and ecological integrity of their local waterbodies: Ventura Coastkeeper (“VCK”) and California Coastkeeper Alliance (“CCKA”) will provide a template for comment letters to the State Water Board to support the additions to the 2010 303(d) polluted waters list; VCK has offered to train community groups in data collection techniques through participation in VCK's watershed monitoring program; and both VCK and CCKA will be available for follow up data submission questions prior to the June 30, 2010 deadline to submit data to the Regional Board for the 2012 303(d) listings.

The State Water Board’s creation of a list of “impaired,” or severely polluted, water bodies is only the first step. The federal Clean Water Act requires that the Board to also identify the pollutants responsible and design a plan to restore the waterways to their original uses. California law requires the state to address all sources of pollution in this plan, which then must be implemented to ensure the good health of all of the state’s waterways.

Learn More:

California Coastkeeper Alliance is co-sponsoring workshops on impaired waters throughout California during the month of May. Please visit our website to learn more and get involved: <http://www.cacoastkeeper.org/programs/clean-abundant/severely-polluted-waters>.

Visit the State Water Board website to learn more about the impaired waters process: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/tmdl/docs/data_solicitation_ir2012v2.pdf

To volunteer with Ventura Coastkeeper’s Watershed Monitoring Program or to Learn More about Water Quality Monitoring in Ventura County visit: <http://www.wishtoyo.org/vck-watershed-monitoring-program.html> or email jweiner.venturacoastkeeper@wishtoyo.org.