



Ventura Coastkeeper Launches Its New Ventura County Watershed Monitoring Program with 6 Stream Team Routes and 35 Sites

On the Birthday of the Clean Water Act, Watershed Monitoring and Stewardship by Ventura County's Residents is Needed As Much as Ever

The State of Ventura County's Waters

37 years after the Clean Water Act was born on October 18, 1972, the water quality and ecological integrity of much of Ventura County's inland and coastal waterbodies remain unsuitable for aquatic wildlife and human uses. In the Calleguas Creek Watershed, excessive nutrients, pesticides, bacteria, trash, and toxic metals pour off of agricultural fields, wash down our storm drains, and are discharged from sewage spills, devastating aquatic wildlife along their way to Mugu Lagoon - an Area of Special Biological Significance which is a toxic feeding ground for local and migratory endangered and threatened wildlife. Meanwhile, residents are fishing and consuming fish from Revolon Slough, harvesting watercress from the Calleguas and its tributaries, and the marine creatures that end up on our dinner plates are bioaccumulating pollutants from the multitude of small contaminated critters they consume from the watershed.

Ormond Beach Wetlands is home to the Halaco Superfund Site and is the receiving waterbody for two storm drains that serve as Oxnard's dumping zones for trash, organic debris, and excessive applications of agritoxins and nutrients that wash off agricultural operations applying water liberally to fields without sufficient buffer zones to prevent pollutants from being carried off by their runoff. Oxnard's Ormond Beach Wetlands is also home to, and serves as migratory grounds for, numerous federally listed endangered species including the snowy plover, California least tern, and tidewater goby. The wetlands are of significant importance to Oxnard's residents, many of which are economically and politically marginalized, and whose health and wellbeing can benefit from an aesthetically pristine and ecologically healthy environment in their backyard.

The Santa Clara River, the largest free flowing wild river in Southern California, was once home to over 8,000 returning adult steelhead per year before the United Water Conservation District blocked their passage to their upstream spawning grounds by building a dam with an impassable fish passage. The steelhead also thrived before algal blooms from nutrient loading, and pesticides and salts from irrigation runoff filled their migratory routes and holdover waters, and before a sewage treatment plant discharged excessive loads of pollutants into the Santa Clara River Estuary.

The Ventura River, also once home to plentiful steelhead and red legged frog populations, is impacted by the impassible Matilija Dam, agricultural discharges of pesticides, unnecessary and excessive herbicide applications to control weeds and invasive species, and unchecked urban runoff.

And just about all of Ventura County's coastal waters, enjoyed by residents and visitors as bathing and surfing spots, receive healthy doses of dangerous bacteria, nutrients, and toxic metals from all of

these watershed's inadequately treated sewage, urban runoff flowing down storm drains, pesticide runoff from farmlands, and from toxic and illegal industrial discharges.

Our Legal and Human Right to Clean Water and Ecologically Healthy Waterbodies

All of these impairments to Ventura County's inland and coastal waterbodies can be attributed to private and public dischargers who are blatantly violating the Clean Water Act by their actions and inactions.

To Mati Waiya, Chumash Ceremonial Elder, and Ventura Coastkeeper's and Wishtoyo's Executive Director, who harvests tule from river banks to build aps (traditional Chumash dwelling units) and stones from river beds for Chumash ceremonial sweats, it is "irresponsible that we need the Clean Water Act, because it tells us that we not only forget what nourishes our food, plants, habitats, and everything we depend upon and co-exist with, but it proves we are disrespecting the gifts and resources we need to survive."

As Robert Kennedy Jr. professes, an environmental crime is a crime against humanity. Every child should have a right to take a fish from our marine waters and rivers to feed his or her family. Every person should be able to breath clean air, drink clean water, and have access to safe waters to swim and recreate in, in their own backyard, regardless of their economic or political status. Traveling 200 miles and paying a \$20 entry fee to experience a functioning or pristine wilderness, or to experience steelhead runs, should not be the expected or settled upon norm, as it makes the access to the public commons or an in tact and ecologically healthy natural ecosystem inaccessible or foreign to the common person. Children should not have to suffer from cancer or develop depression from the hidden toxins they ingest in their drinking and swimming water. The Native American peoples that inhabited our coasts for tens and thousands of years should still be able to celebrate their culture by honoring the purity of water and experiencing the wildlife they pray, sing, and tell stories about. You or I should be able to immerse ourselves into the Santa Clara River bed, and surround ourselves with purity and beauty. Or how about a simple walk through the Ormond Beach Wetlands with friends, loved ones, or by oneself, enjoying chirping migratory birds, jumping fish, and the sound of waves crashing in the background without a toxic eyesore and a steady flow of pollutants from storm drains that degrade its ecosystem and aesthetic beauty.

The Importance of Watershed Monitoring

"Watershed Monitoring – the monitoring of water quality and pinpointing of pollution sources – is as important to Ventura County as ever...It is the only tool we have, as residents of the watersheds to which we all belong, to ensure that we can locate and stop pollution at its source," expresses Jason Weiner, Ventura Coastkeeper's Associate Director and Staff Attorney. As Bill Clinton says, "if you have a law and don't enforce it you don't have a law." "37 years after the passage of the Clean Water Act, we have a Clean Water Act, but clearly do not have sufficient enforcement or implementation, especially in Ventura County," continues Jason Weiner.

In Ventura County, who is inspecting and sampling effluent discharges from local business and taking action to ensure they are not contaminating our waters? Who is sampling water quality from urban runoff and using the results to enact change? Who is monitoring water quality discharged from agricultural fields to aid in the development, effectiveness, implementation, and enforcement of the agricultural waiver program? The answer to all of the above without citizen monitoring designed to generate actionable data that can be used to improve the water quality and ecological integrity of our

inland and coastal waterbodies is no one, or government agencies that do not have sufficient enforcement capabilities, that are not equipped with an adequate combination of monitoring and policy schemes to mandate pollution abatement, and or that do not or cannot devote the resources necessary to enforce and mandate change.

Ventura Coastkeeper's Watershed Monitoring Program

Ventura Coastkeeper's Watershed Monitoring Program aims to fill the erosion of local, state, and federal democracy that has abetted and continues to abet the degradation of Ventura County's waterbodies by allowing our commons, in which we have a human right to fish in, swim in, drink, and bathe in - to slip into private hands.

Through 35 monthly monitoring sites, 28 of which are new, in the Calleguas Creek, Santa Clara River, Ventura River, Ormond Beach Watershed, and in storm drains that discharge into Ventura County's Coastal Waters, Ventura Coastkeeper has begun to and aims to gather water quality data that will enable Ventura Coastkeeper and the public to identify and designate waterbodies as impaired for their beneficial uses, to recommend solutions that abate water quality impairments, and to inform and enable policy to eliminate pollution. Importantly, Ventura Coastkeeper is using and strives to use the water quality data generated from its Watershed Monitoring Program to track down pollution sources, to prosecute polluters, and to enforce water laws that our government is failing to enforce, and in some instances failing to comply with itself.

As detailed in the diagram below, Ventura Coastkeeper's Watershed Monitoring Program currently monitors 35 sites monthly in Ventura County via visual observations, photographic evidence, field equipment, and taking samples and analyzing samples in its laboratory. The 35 sites are covered by 6 Stream Teams composed of Ventura Coastkeeper Staff and local watershed volunteers. Amongst the constituents routinely monitored for include: phosphate, nitrate, ammonia, total coliform, e-coli, dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity (measure of total dissolved solids), turbidity (measure of total suspended solids), water temperature, trash, and algae, color, and odor. Analysis for total and dissolved metals, toxicity, and pesticides are taken from discharges suspected to be in violation of the Clean Water Act. Ventura Coastkeeper monitors in accordance with the quality control and assurance procedures set forth in its QAPP (Quality Assurance Project Plan) certified and approved by the Los Angeles Regional Quality Control Board. Ventura Coastkeeper's staff is also certified to monitor for water quality, and to train its volunteers to monitor for water quality, by the State Water Quality Control Board's Clean Water Team. Also incorporated into Ventura Coastkeeper's Watershed Monitoring Program is a cultural preservation component that will record the history of the Chumash People and their cultural resources at each sampling site.

Aside from relying on its local and dedicated Stream Team volunteers to assist Ventura Coastkeeper with its monthly sampling efforts, Ventura Coastkeeper also depends on local stewards or citizens concerned about the health of their waterbodies to report pollution to Ventura Coastkeeper and appropriate government authorities so we can take action to abate the pollution. Ventura Coastkeeper's Watershed Monitoring Program thus strives to empower local communities with the tools and information they need to monitor their waterbodies, and to identify and report pollution.

Map of Ventura Coastkeeper's Watershed Monitoring Locations



Wishtoyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper Watershed Monitoring Program



VCK's Watershed Monitoring Program Playing a Critical Role in Enabling the Enforcement and Implementation of the Receiving Water Limitations Provisions of the Ventura MS4¹ Permit

Additionally, Ventura Coastkeeper's ("VCK's) Watershed Monitoring Program is designed to better enable the implementation and enforcement of the Receiving Water Limitations provisions of Ventura County's new stormwater permit ("MS4 Permit") that aims to improve stormwater quality discharged from existing stormwater infrastructure. The receiving water limitations provisions of the MS4 Permit requires municipalities to implement urban runoff pollution prevention best management practices ("BMPs") if their stormwater or dry weather urban runoff discharges to MS4s persistently cause or contribute to a violation of water quality standards in receiving waterbodies, such as rivers, lakes, streams, or coastal waters. While the MS4 Permit requires each municipality to monitor from one of their MS4s, the municipalities are not required to monitor in the receiving waterbodies directly downstream from the confluence of their MS4 and the MS4's receiving waterbody to determine if the MS4 discharge is causing or contributing to an exceedance of water quality standards in the MS4's receiving waterbody. Instead, the permittees are only required to monitor water quality from one mass emissions station in each of the Calleguas Creek, the Santa Clara River, and the Ventura River watersheds, which are located far downstream from most of the

¹ An MS4 is a system of conveyances that include catch basins, curbs, gutters, ditches, man-made channels, pipes, tunnels, or storm drains that discharges into waters of the United States. An MS4 moves water away from an area into a local water body, such a river, stream, lake, estuary, wetlands, lagoon, or marine waters.

municipalities' MS4 discharges required to be monitored under the MS4 Permit. Thus, absent VCK's Monitoring Program that monitors water quality monthly in dry and wet weather events from at least one of every permittees' MS4 discharges, and then in the receiving waterbody immediately downstream of the MS4's discharge, the MS4 Permit may not be able to fully prevent MS4 discharges derived from existing stormwater infrastructure from impairing coastal and inland waterbodies. Furthermore, VCK's stormwater monitoring program 1.) has the capability of producing more frequent monitoring reports to enable faster implementation of the receiving water limitations provisions and 2.) monitors: MS4 discharges and receiving waters with no monitoring requirements under the MS4 Permit, such as MS4 discharges into the Ormond Beach Wetlands; MS4 discharges into coastal waters; MS4 discharges not required to be monitored under the MS4 Permit; and receiving water locations in coastal marine waters.

As we honor the birth of the Clean Water Act with the launch of our new Watershed Monitoring Program, Mati Waiya, Chumash Ceremonial Elder, and Ventura Coastkeeper and Wishtoyo Foundation Executive Director has this to share about the importance of clean water to his people and society:

“Sacred waters have traveled through the veins of our world for thousands upon thousands of years. They have nourished our lives—a gift from the Creator. Let us never distance ourselves from any drop. In our culture we believe that water is like a liquid crystal that represents clarity of mind, spirit and of the health of our bodies—we too are from this precious resource.”

About The Wishtoyo Foundation and its Ventura Coastkeeper Program:

Founded in 1997, Wishtoyo is a 501(c)(3) non profit grassroots organization with over 700 members consisting of Ventura County's diverse residents and Chumash Native Americans. Wishtoyo's mission is to preserve and protect Chumash culture, the culture of all of Ventura County's diverse communities, and the environment that our current and future generations depend upon. Wishtoyo shares traditional Chumash Native American beliefs, cultural practices, songs, dances, stories, and values with the public in its Chumash Discovery Village and through educational programs in schools to promote environmental awareness and natural resources stewardship. In 2000, Wishtoyo founded its Ventura Coastkeeper Program (“VCK”). VCK's mission is to protect, preserve, and restore the ecological integrity and water quality of Ventura County's inland and coastal waterbodies for all beings in the County's diverse community through outreach and education, restoration projects, advocacy, litigation, and community organizing and empowerment. Wishtoyo and its Ventura Coastkeeper program believe that our land, waterbodies, and oceans are interconnected, co-dependent communities to which we as individuals, are one of many living entities that belong. As such, it is our responsibility to protect the land, water, and oceans we exist upon for the common good and to sustain our well being, co-existence, and harmony with the world and the many diverse surrounding communities that we depend on.

For more information about VCK's Watershed Monitoring Program contact: Jason Weiner at 805-823-3301, jweiner.venturacoastkeeper@wishtoyo.org and Mati Waiya at 805-794-1248, mati.waiya@wishtoyo.org

To volunteer with Ventura Coastkeeper's Watershed Monitoring Program email: jweiner.venturacoastkeeper@wishtoyo.org and visit <http://www.wishtoyo.org/vck-stream-team-volunteer.html> for monthly monitoring opportunities.