

**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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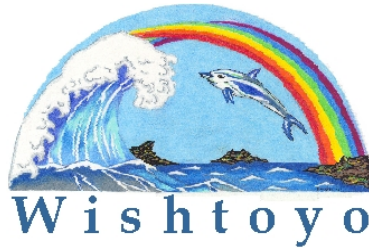
**The Wishtoyo Foundation and its Ventura Coastkeeper Program File a Notice of Intent to Sue United Water Conservation District and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

*Move to Save and Restore the “Isha’kowoch” (Southern California Steelhead) and the Ecological Integrity of the Santa Clara River, Aims to Protect Chumash Native American Cultural Resources and the Well Being of Southern California’s Diverse Communities.*

**Saticoy, Calif.** – The Wishtoyo Foundation and its Ventura Coastkeeper Program (Wishtoyo) have filed a 60-Day Notice of Intent to Sue (NOI) United Water Conservation District (United) and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau). Wishtoyo’s move to join California Trout in its on-going litigation against United and Bureau, is the only course of action it has to protect and restore the endangered and severely threatened “Isha’kowoch” (Southern California Steelhead), which is a vital resource to Chumash Native American Culture, the well being of Southern California’s diverse communities, and the ecological integrity of the Santa Clara River.

The NOI asserts that United’s and the Bureau’s operation of the Vern Freeman Diversion Dam (Vern Freeman Dam) and its dysfunctional fish ladder are causing ongoing harm, harassment and death to the endangered Southern California steelhead, and adversely modifying their critical habitat in violation of the Federal Endangered Species Act and California Fish and Game Code. Wishtoyo’s NOI, comes at the heels of United’s and the Bureau’s continued failure and unwillingness to implement the interim and long-term logistically and financially feasible corrective measures at the Vern Freeman Dam to protect steelhead as mandated in the National Marine Fisheries Service Final Biological Opinion. The thorough and scientifically substantiated Final Biological opinion conclusively found that the operations and dysfunctional fish ladder at the Vern Freeman Dam jeopardize Southern California steelhead and adversely modify its critical habitat.

The Santa Clara River, the largest river system in Southern California flowing approximately 100 miles within a 1,600 square mile watershed, is home Southern California’s best steelhead habitat. The operation of the Vern Freeman Dam and its dysfunctional fish ladder now blocks steelhead access to 99% of its watershed. Sespe, Piru, and Santa Paula Creek, all located in the Santa Clara River Watershed above the dam, provide unmatched high quality habitat for steelhead spawning and rearing. For this reason, the fish passage at Vern Freeman is of vital importance to the migration of all steelhead in the Santa Clara River watershed because all the steelhead entering or leaving the Santa Clara River must pass this diversion.



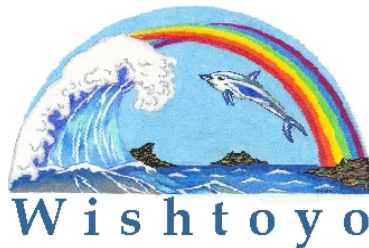
As a result of United's and the Bureau's operation of the Vern Freeman Dam and its dysfunctional fish ladder, steelhead runs have dropped from 7,000 to 9,000 returning adults to 0-2 annually. Overall, the Southern California Steelhead run size for the four major river systems (Santa Clara, Santa Ynez, Malibu, and Ventura) within the Southern California Steelhead range has dropped from between 32,000 to 46,000 to fewer than 500 adults, and now total run sizes in river systems within the range of Southern Steelhead are believed to range between less than 5 anadromous adults per year to less than 100 anadromous adults per year. In its final biological opinion, NMFS noted that the Southern California Steelhead is at high risk at becoming extinct in the foreseeable future.

The Chumash Native American name for Southern California Steelhead is "Isha'kowoch" (the glistening salmon). The Chumash people have a strong cultural interest in the recovery of the Isha'kowoch, that for over 10,000 years played a significant role in sustaining a healthy Santa Clara River ecosystem that spiritually and physically supported the Chumash coastal communities and villages located alongside and within the Santa Clara River watershed.

To the Chumash, the glistening glow and shimmering of the Isha'kowoch in rivers as represented in their pictographs, art, ceremonies, songs, and prayers represents the pureness of water and the cleansing of one's soul. Additionally, the Chumash song about paddling in tomols (Chumash canoes) or tule reed boats on rivers, ponds, and coastal waters, focuses around the Isha'kowoch and the lessons it teaches us. In the song, the effort to paddle forward, like an Isha'kowoch going upstream with strength, endurance, and drive around all barriers to reach the destination, carries the paddlers through the water to where they need to go. As the song continues, the Isha'kowoch, battle and cut through the water and its current, and take time to rest in ponds or pools so they can continue to where they can spawn and guarantee a future.

In modern times, the Isha'kowoch continues to be a resource whose continued thriving existence remains vital to the preservation and revitalization of Chumash culture. Living within the Santa Clara Watershed for over 10,000 years, the Chumash people have a cultural and sovereign right to take a steelhead or two from a healthy adult steelhead population for ceremonial and traditional uses; to be woken up by the splashing of thousands of steelhead whose glistening glow turns the river silver under moonlight; to enjoy and sustainably harvest native plants and critters from the Santa Clara River's watershed that depend on steelhead to provide nutrient inputs and trophic ecosystem balance; and to experience steelhead runs in combination with their currently practiced Isha'kowoch ceremonies, songs, prayers, and art to best connect with their ancestral roots and culture.

"Experiencing Isha'kowoch runs and being able just to honor the harvest of a single Isha'kowoch will allow our people to reconnect with our culture and ancestors in ways



that will not be possible without the construction of a functional fish passage over the dam and sufficient flow releases that allow for Isha'kowoch migration," said Mati Waiya, a Chumash spiritual leader and the Executive Director of the Wishtoyo Foundation.

"In addition to the vital role that restoring steelhead on the Santa Clara River will play for the preservation and revitalization of Chumash culture and the ecological integrity of the Santa Clara River, restoring steelhead runs is also vital to providing Ventura and Los Angeles County residents and low income communities with their right as human beings to enjoy and spiritually benefit from healthy functioning ecosystems," said Jason Weiner, the Associate Director of the Ventura Coastkeeper and Staff Attorney for the Wishtoyo Foundation. Jason expressed, on behalf of the Wishtoyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper program, that "our diverse local communities deserve the enhanced well being and the environmental, economic, spiritual, recreational, and aesthetic benefits that accompany healthy steelhead populations ... At the center of this problem is also an environmental justice issue... Ventura County and Los Angeles County residents should not have to fork out hundreds and even thousands of dollars to experience beautiful functional ecosystems when they could and should have the experience and benefit in their own backyard."

The Endangered Species Act provides for suits by citizens to enforce the Act when a violation occurs. The Act requires that before a citizens' suit may be filed, 60 days notice be given of the intent to file the suit, in which time action may be taken to remedy the violation.

#### **About The Wishtoyo Foundation and its Ventura Coastkeeper Program:**

The Wishtoyo Foundation, a community based 501(c)(3) non profit with over 700 members consisting of Ventura County residents, Chumash Native Americans, and the general public that enjoys, depends on, and visits Ventura County's inland and coastal waterbodies. Wishtoyo uses traditional Native American Chumash beliefs, practices, songs, stories and dances to increase awareness of our connection with the environment and to preserve the maritime culture and resources of the Chumash people and coastal communities. Core values of the Chumash include sustainable living and respect for the environment. In 2000, the Wishtoyo Foundation launched the Ventura Coastkeeper to protect, preserve, and restore the ecological integrity and water quality of Ventura County's inland waterbodies, coastal waters, and watersheds.

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.