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Coalition of large local water users releases physical solution for the Ventura River Watershed

Municipal and agricultural water users share their local, collaborative physical solution developed to protect the Ventura River Watershed and all those who rely on it

Ventura, Calif. (Sept. 15, 2020) – Municipal and agricultural users (consumptive users group) have participated in a collaborative partnership to produce a locally determined, court-approved and binding physical solution to protect the Ventura River and all those who rely upon it. It is now ready for public review and final submittal to the court for approval. Those in partnership include the Ventura River Water District, Meiners Oaks Water District, the Wood-Claeysens Foundation (Taylor Ranch), Rancho Matilija Mutual Water Company, other agricultural water interests and the City of Ventura. The negotiating parties also consulted with other interests in the Watershed for input on the physical solution.

The consumptive users group is advocating for this local solution in order to protect local water rights and prevent a State-mandated solution, which would be forthcoming if this is not accomplished.

The physical solution proposed, which is based on the work of experts on the Steelhead population and the Watershed's unique hydrology, establishes a comprehensive approach toward implementing specific actions throughout the Watershed to address the habitat conditions for the Steelhead population in order to return the habitat to good condition, and then maintain it. Additionally, it preserves and protects all reasonable and beneficial uses of water of the Ventura River Watershed and reasonably balances the needs of public trust resources with consumptive use needs, while addressing the fishery's needs.

Specifically, the proposed components include:

- Removing barriers in the Watershed that block the Steelhead's access to critical habitat.
- Improving the habitat in the Watershed so that the Steelhead have places to spawn, rear and grow before they leave for the ocean.
- Creating programs that reduce non-native species such as Arundo and non-native fish populations that are preying upon the Steelhead population or harming the habitat.
- Developing ongoing monitoring efforts to monitor the health of the Steelhead population, to better understand hydrology in the Watershed and to monitor the quality of water as it relates to the Steelhead population.

“We are proud of the collaborative work that has been put forth by all parties who have participated in this process with us,” said Susan Rungren, Ventura Water General Manager. “We strongly believe this solution demonstrates the City's commitment in following through on its promise to be a part of the solution to protect the fishery and all those who rely upon the Ventura River.”

“We are supportive of this plan as it addresses the needs of the biological resources in the Watershed and provides water users with sorely needed long-term stability, something that is particularly important for our members' agricultural operations,” said Jurgen Gramckow, President, Rancho Matilija Mutual Water Company.

“Since June of 2019, we have been collaborating with large and small water users in the Ventura River Watershed to find a reasonable solution to the adjudication,” said Bruce Kuebler, Director with the Ventura River Water District. “As our board’s designated director to participate in this collaboration, I urge support for the process. It has reached the point when our community needs to discuss it and provide comments to their elected board and council members, and we look forward to continuing to improve the approach, including ways to equitably share the costs.”

“The Foundation fully supports this locally lead effort to protect the Ventura River system, its ecosystem and all the people, farms and businesses that depend upon it for generations to come,” said Noelle Burkey, Wood-Claeysens Foundation CEO.

The physical solution does not impair nor determine water rights, priority or water allocations. The City of Ventura is not asking for legal fees or reimbursement related to this adjudication. To view the proposed physical solution and supporting documents, please visit the website dedicated exclusively to this issue, www.venturariver.com.

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