



Santa Barbara CHANNELKEEPER®

Keeping watch for clean water

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Our mission is to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds through science-based advocacy, education, field work and enforcement

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News from the Crew

Greetings from all of the crew at Santa Barbara Channelkeeper!

If there was ever a fitting offshore boating analogy for 2020, I would say that it feels as though we've rounded the west end of Santa Cruz Island and entered the Potato Patch. This stretch of water between Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa Islands is infamous for its convergence of eddies, currents, and north-westerly swell. It's an unpredictable and rocky ride across a space where turbulent waters and opposing forces meet. It can be challenging to navigate.

In this time of uncertainty, faced with so many forces outside of my own control, I find reassurance in my team of coworkers and our steady and determined work to protect this place that we call our home.

It's a mindful practice for me to distill the challenges we face in life down to things that we can impact. With a swipe on my phone I can immerse myself in a world of challenges for which I have no solution. Or I can choose to use the means that I have available to take care of what surrounds me here and now. I remind myself: I am surrounded by the beauty and sustenance of the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds, and I choose to use my mind, my body, and my words to make a difference in this place I've made my home. We can all do this.

As you'll read in this newsletter, Channelkeeper made a huge difference in 2020. This year we helped bring a river back to life. We are on the verge of securing first-ever regulatory protections for our rivers and groundwater supplies from agricultural pollution. We mobilized a growing new force of volunteers to patrol our watersheds and beaches. We advocated for sustainable local water supplies and worked to tackle plastic pollution at its source. Each and every day, our team has devoted itself to protecting and restoring the Channel and its watersheds, and our accomplishments are too numerous to list here.

We ask that you join us in taking a stand for clean water. Whether you donate to the cause, volunteer your time and energy, or help us spread our message of environmental stewardship, you too are making a difference. It's going to take every one of us.

Bring on 2021. We've got work to do!

Ben Pitterle

Interim Executive Director, Waterkeeper



A Farewell to Kira Redmond



This fall we are saddened to bid bon voyage to Kira Redmond who is leaving us after an extraordinary 16-year tenure as our Executive Director.

In Kira's time at the helm, Channelkeeper has grown from a relatively new non-profit into a highly effective advocate for our local environment. Under her leadership, Channelkeeper's successes were wide-ranging, including our settlement agreement with the City of Santa Barbara that required and resulted in a drastic reduction in raw sewage releases into our waterways and the ocean. Other successes may have been less visible, but had similar huge impacts on our waterways: storm water management, contaminated soil cleanup, taking over water quality sampling at beaches across Santa Barbara County, and the creation of our Stream Teams to collect water quality data that has been instrumental in a number of important issues Channelkeeper has taken on.

Although Kira's departure is obviously a challenge, we are fortunate that the top-notch staff she assembled continues to carry Channelkeeper's mission forward with exceptional skill and grace. Our staff has demonstrated flexibility and resilience throughout this crazy year of 2020, and has continued to record successes in protecting and restoring the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to express our appreciation for Kira's commitment to Channelkeeper and the remarkable list of accomplishments she led us to.

As we look to the future, we are sure to face even bigger challenges than before. But we are confident that on the foundation Kira helped build, with the solid staff team we have in place, and with the support of all of you, Channelkeeper is poised for exceptional accomplishments!

Right now, we pause to express gratitude and pride in what we have achieved to date, but we eagerly anticipate the greater challenges, and successes, that are ahead of us.

Mike Wondolowski
President, Board of Directors



*“After many years of legal process and negotiation, we have secured a binding commitment from the City to turn off its wells when river flows drop below minimum levels, **keeping the river alive** until a final, long-term agreement is reached.”*

Restoring Flows to the Ventura River

Channelkeeper is proud to announce a MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENT in our years-long endeavor to protect the Ventura River from over-pumping. Channelkeeper and the City of Ventura have reached a new agreement to ensure that the City leaves a meaningful amount of water behind to keep the river flowing for endangered species, other wildlife, and recreational uses.

Decades of mismanagement and over-pumping have left the river severely degraded, and vital stretches of the river have been periodically pumped dry, destroying the habitat and wildlife that depend on the river. In 2015, Channelkeeper filed a lawsuit to compel the State Water Resources Control Board to intervene and address over-pumping by the City of Ventura to ensure a balance

between water supply and ecosystem needs. After many years of legal process and negotiation, we have secured a binding commitment from the City to turn off its wells when river flows drop below minimum levels, keeping the river alive until a final, long-term agreement is reached.

Prior to Channelkeeper’s intervention, nothing prevented the City and others from taking every last drop from the river. Now, we have secured an interim commitment to keep this cherished ecosystem flowing through each dry season until a long-term watershed-wide solution is finalized. Channelkeeper maintains a key seat at the table as the City, other pumpers, and state agencies work towards a final agreement to keep the river flowing.

Fighting California's Agricultural Pollution Problem

Farming is an essential aspect of California's economy and way of life, but it's also the number one source of pollution to groundwater supplies and many of our rivers, streams, and wetlands. Since 2004, Channelkeeper has been the leading local voice advocating to protect our waterways from agricultural pollution.

In 2013, Channelkeeper joined a coalition of five nonprofit organizations, and an elderly resident who couldn't drink water from her tap because of agricultural pollution, in filing a lawsuit against the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, arguing that the state agency had failed in its duty to protect public health and the environment from agricultural pollution on the Central Coast. Both the Superior and Appellate Court eventually ruled in favor of our claim, and the state was directed to go back to the drawing board and write new regulations that uphold the law and protect our water supplies.

Last summer, Channelkeeper continued to fight for this cause, presenting on a panel of partner organizations to weigh in on the state's new proposal, named Ag Order 4.0. Ag Order 4.0 is the state's response to our legal victory, and it proposes to set first-time-ever limits on fertilizer applications to protect our

groundwater supplies and provide other protections for water quality and natural habitats. The agricultural lobby continues to advocate against these protections; however, we remain committed to this cause and look forward to a future when agricultural pollution is a thing of the past.

*“Currently, farms discharge nitrogen at levels **ten times higher** than levels that are safe for drinking water and protective of the environment.”*

Records show that the vast majority of farms egregiously over-apply fertilizer. According to the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control

Board, over half of the nitrogen applied as fertilizer ends up as harmful pollution to the environment. Currently, farms discharge nitrogen at levels ten times higher than levels that are safe for drinking water and protective of the environment. The Regional Board has issued findings that “groundwater nitrate (fertilizer) contamination is widespread and severe, and degradation is increasing in many areas.” Nitrates leaching from fields into aquifers have left over 100,000 square miles of groundwater contaminated with nitrates throughout California resulting in toxic drinking water supplies.

Channelkeeper has worked on this issue for over a decade and we will continue to champion protection of water quality as the new Ag Order is finalized and implemented.



Tackling Plastic

It's ubiquitous — found in the deepest recesses of the Mariana Trench, the bellies of fish, the air we breathe, and our blood. Plastic pollution in all its forms is a mounting global concern, and it also has impacts locally, which is why reducing single-use plastic continues to be a major focus of Channelkeeper's work.

With the COVID-19 crisis, the plastic industry lobbied aggressively for the suspension, rollback, or cancellation of single-use plastic bans. Big Plastic leveraged fear and misinformation to encourage the use of single-use plastic items. In late spring, California temporarily suspended the statewide single-use plastic bag ban. Thankfully, the suspension expired after the initial period, allowing us to resume shopping with reusable bags and to continue our fight against plastic pollution. We are also pleased to share that many of the other single-use plastic reduction policies throughout the country that were temporarily delayed or suspended have been reinstated.

“With the COVID-19 crisis, the plastic industry lobbied aggressively for the suspension, rollback, or cancellation of single-use plastic ban.”

Two plastic pollution reduction bills—the CA Circular Economy (SB 54) and Plastic Pollution Reduction Act (AB 1080)— failed to pass the California



State Assembly this fall. These bills would have reduced single-use plastics across California by 75% by 2032. Although the bills ultimately failed, they did pass in the Senate and also generated significant awareness about this issue. There is also a concurrent effort called the Plastic Free California initiative that has qualified for the 2022 ballot and will take this issue to CA voters. We will keep you informed about this effort and opportunities to take action.

Channelkeeper will continue our work locally to educate the community about the impacts of single-use plastic and ways to reduce its use, while also continuing to advocate for local policies to reduce single-use plastic and helping to set an example for the state.

Channelkeeper also continues to support the Ablitt's Film Plastic collection project, which recently re-opened. Collection events are by appointment only and community members are now asked to sort their own plastic and take home any plastic that is not accepted. Please contact penny@sbck.org for more information.

Thank you for joining us in the movement for plastic-free seas. Stay tuned for opportunities to voice your support for local, state, and federal policies to rein in plastic pollution.



Water for Tomorrow

Do you know where the City of Santa Barbara gets its water? Do you know the risks and challenges facing our water supply? Did you know that the City is currently developing a comprehensive water plan to guide City water policy for the next 30 years? If you answered “no” to any of these questions, read on!

A rigorous technical process is underway to evaluate water supply alternatives for the City of Santa Barbara, but administrators are also looking for input from the community to inform the City’s Water Vision plan. October has been designated as “Water Vision Month” and the City has created a virtual engagement platform for you to share your views and comments.

Join Channelkeeper in advocating for sustainable water supply alternatives like advanced water recycling and conservation requirements that align our water-use lifestyles with the climate we actually live in.

Help us prioritize watershed and ocean protection as a core element of the City’s plan. Recorded virtual “Lunch and Learn” talks and a number of other informative videos on water topics can be found by exploring “Water Vision Month” on www.santabarbaraca.gov.

Pledge to be, Mylar Free!

Thousands of Mylar balloons blown from the Santa Barbara mainland litter our oceans. This past Spring Channelkeeper had the pleasure of serving as a project mentor for high school student Dori Larbig on her Girl Scout “Gold Award” Community Service project called “Mylar Mistake.” Dori was inspired to start an educational project after seeing Mylar balloons in the Santa Barbara Channel first-hand while on a kayaking trip at the Channel Islands with her Girl Scout Troop.

Visit her project website at www.MylarMistake.com to learn more about the impacts of mylar balloons to marine wildlife, creative alternatives to balloons, and to take the pledge to be Mylar Free!





Join the Watershed Brigade!

Covid-19 has changed many things for us, but not our community's desire to roll up its sleeves and get to work doing something meaningful!

This summer's social distancing restrictions resulted in a huge increase in recreation in our watersheds. With this uptick came a significant increase in litter. Traditional group clean-up events are not always compatible with social distancing guidelines, so Channelkeeper developed a new way to harness our community's collective energy to keep our waterways clean.

The Watershed Brigade is a new volunteer program that mobilizes participants to get out onto our trails, beaches, swimming holes, and creeks, to help remove litter and provide friendly environmental outreach to visitors. Brigade volunteers were out in force during the Memorial Day

and 4th of July weekends, keeping our watersheds from Goleta to Ojai clean. Our first official Brigade Challenge was launched in September in time for California Coastal Cleanup month. Participating individuals and family units receive points for their time volunteering and points earn entries in raffle giveaways. In September, we gave away our first prize, an awesome two-hour kayak harbor tour for two that was donated by our friends at Santa Barbara Adventure Company!

The Watershed Brigade is just getting started and over the coming months we will be offering more fun volunteer challenges and raffle giveaways to participants. Check out our webpage (www.sbck.org/brigade), join our Facebook group (SBCK Watershed Brigade), grab some cleanup supplies, and become a part of our team!



Santa Barbara Channelkeeper celebrated 20 years as clean water stewards and protectors of our community's right to clean water on September 9th at the first ever virtual Blue Water Ball – Second Sail.

The event was seamlessly orchestrated by Master of Ceremonies Geoff Green, CEO of Santa Barbara City College Foundation. The evening's festivities included a message from our Board President, Mike Wondolowski, and a recap of Channelkeeper's recent and past victories by Executive Director, Kira Redmond, who also announced her departure after 16 impactful years.

Channelkeeper supporters, staff, and board members expressed their gratitude for Kira's commitment and hard work over the years to protect our right to clean water.

The Blue Water Ball is Channelkeeper's most important fundraiser of the year, raising critical funds that enable us to monitor the health of our waterways, advocate for clean water and environmental justice, hold polluters accountable, and educate and inspire the next generation of environmental stewards. At this year's event, Channelkeeper was able to raise over \$55,000 to support our mission to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel. With just a few adjustments, our ocean-loving community was able to gather online and celebrate Channelkeeper's meaningful work.

Ron Artis II provided a soulful musical performance and message of hope for our local Channel. The evening's live-streamed celebration was something new for all of our crew, but the silver lining was our 160 registered guests were able to enjoy a relaxing evening in the comfort and safety of their own homes AND participate in one of Santa Barbara's most popular galas of the season.

Channelkeeper would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Oniracom for providing a wonderful COVID-safe streaming location, to Paul Mattieu for his streaming support services, and Riviera Towel Co. for their generous donation of Channelkeeper logo beach totes for our larger paddle raise donors. And of course, we extend our deepest gratitude to the gracious and generous individual and corporate sponsors who helped make this magical night possible.

Many thanks to our Corporate Sponsors



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Intern Spotlight

This fall, SBCK welcomed aboard two new college interns from UCSB to assist us in our important long-term water quality monitoring work.



Mykala Listorti



Ezekiel Tortal

Mykala Listorti is a second-year biology major who is also a shark enthusiast and Ezekiel Tortal is a third-year UCSB pharmacology major who is passionate about giving back to the environment. These awesome student interns will help us monitor the water quality of 22 creek sites in the Goleta Valley Watershed. Additionally, they will gain valuable mentorship and work experience in the environmental field. We are excited to have them on our team!



Charitable Giving

Did you know that the recently enacted CARES Act includes enhanced charitable giving incentives, including a new deduction for charitable contributions of up to \$300 for individuals or \$600 for a couple filing jointly? The incentive applies to cash contributions made in 2020 and can be claimed whether you take the standard deduction or itemize. Please note this does NOT apply to donor-advised fund giving - gifts must go straight to a non-profit. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to Santa Barbara Channelkeeper today so we can continue to defend your right to clean water in this challenging and uncertain time. Every penny donated is a direct investment in a healthier environment and a more sustainable future!

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Go to www.waxingpoetic.com, and enter our code BLUEWATER at checkout.



MPA WATCH VIRTUAL TRAINING

Are you into marine conservation and long walks on the beach?

Learn how to collect valuable data on our local Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) while walking along the beautiful beaches of Campus Point, Naples, and Gaviota through Channelkeeper's MPA Watch program.

MPA Watch is a citizen-science initiative to monitor human uses of coastal MPAs and collect data to help inform the management, enforcement, and science of California's MPAs. Our next MPA Watch volunteer training workshop will take place virtually in late October and will be followed by a field training session.

Email penny@sbck.org for more information and future training opportunities.



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