



Santa Barbara
CHANNELKEEPER®

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2021



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NEWS FROM THE CREW

Synchronizing Our Wingbeats

A flock of pelicans skimmed the water as members of the Channelkeeper crew headed out on the boat for the first in-person marine debris outing since the pandemic began. As our team watched the graceful V-formation glide inches above the waves, we couldn't help but notice the calculated precision of the wing movements. It was at once peaceful and exhilarating to observe.

Science tells us that pelicans carefully position their wingtips and synchronize their flapping to catch the preceding bird's updraft and save energy during flight. By aligning their wingbeats, they are more efficient, responsive, and unified against threats. This technique is not exclusive to avian species. As we emerge from this unprecedented year, it's clear that the Channelkeeper Crew has similarly banded together and, with its collective energy, lifted our organization to reach new heights.

Winging at speeds of up to 40 miles per hour, a flock of pelicans can make sweeping turns in an instant, and in recent months, our team has been more agile and collaborative than ever before. We have launched new programs like our Watershed Brigade to empower our community to take local action against litter congesting our waterways. We've discovered new ways to bring interactive environmental curriculum to the classroom, inspiring a new generation of conservationists. We've helped enact policy changes that have improved protections for water quality, aquatic habitats, wildlife, and the health of everyone who enjoys life on the South Coast.

We've also aligned ourselves with other organizations to create a V-formation of mutual support. We've coordinated closely with the California Coastkeeper Alliance, Waterkeeper Alliance, other Waterkeepers, and local partners to strengthen environmental policies at the state and federal levels. Together we have worked to raise awareness about environmental threats like agricultural pollution, the proliferation of plastics, and oil extraction. We've advocated for sustainable water supplies, and clean water policies to help us achieve swimmable, drinkable, fishable water for all.

You, our community, have supported us in this effort. You have helped us keep a vigilant watch for clean water in our creeks, wetlands, beaches, and ocean. You have picked up litter as members of the Watershed Brigade, voiced your advocacy for plastics reduction policies to legislators, and helped us speak on a river's behalf. You have flown wing-to-wing with us this year and in doing so, you have allowed us to emerge a stronger and more unified force for good.

- *The Channelkeeper Crew*

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

714 Bond Avenue
Santa Barbara, CA 93103

tel 805.563.3377

info@sbck.org
sbck.org



HOW SCIENCE INFORMS OUR WORK

Science-based Advocacy, Education, Fieldwork and Enforcement

Data collection and scientific research are integral to Channelkeeper's efforts to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds.

Our team regularly collects data related to the composition, quality, and availability of water resources. We use this data to measure critical threats facing our waters, to support decision-makers in their efforts to protect local waterways, and to raise community awareness and involvement in protecting our water resources. This science-based approach helps us keep local waters clean and it also distinguishes us as a data-driven water quality organization.

Channelkeeper has leveraged citizen science to monitor water quality in local watersheds since 2001. Stream Team collects baseline water quality data every month at up to 43 sites in our region. Stream Team data is uploaded to the State's California Environmental Data Exchange Network. The data has been used as lines of evidence to support multiple listings on the State's 303(d) Impaired Water Bodies List as well as to support development of Total Maximum Daily Load programs in several local watersheds.

“Our scientific foundation has helped us successfully champion stronger policies that better protect our water resources, clean up pollution hot spots, educate our community, and stop illegal discharges into the Santa Barbara Channel and its tributaries.”

Channelkeeper uses cutting-edge monitoring technologies such as deployable sensors and data loggers to collect continuous data for a variety of applications. In the Ventura River watershed, Channelkeeper deploys dissolved oxygen data loggers each summer to monitor the water quality effects of algae growth and diminished stream flow. This data has informed our ongoing work to protect flows in the Ventura River that are sufficient to preserve water quality for endangered steelhead trout.



We also use deployable data logging devices, such as pressure transducers and conductivity sensors, to document and track illicit discharges emanating from the municipal storm drain system. In 2012, this technique helped us monitor the daily, illegal discharge of industrial brine waste into a local watershed in the City of Goleta. This discovery led to intervention of local and state authorities and the eventual elimination of the pollution source.

Channelkeeper also helps other agencies gather data. Aboard the RV-Channelkeeper, our 31-foot research vessel, our team has assisted the Department of Public Health with biotoxin monitoring, the Department of Fish and Wildlife with Marine Protected Area compliance monitoring, and University of California Santa Barbara researchers with everything from ocean acidification monitoring, biological surveys, and e-DNA sampling of eelgrass beds.

Data collection and scientific research are fundamental to Channelkeeper's efforts to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds. Our scientific foundation has helped us successfully champion stronger policies that better protect our water resources, clean up pollution hot spots, educate our community, and stop illegal discharges into the Santa Barbara Channel and its tributaries. It's allowed us to better serve our community by supporting our environmental advocacy with quantitative measurements and has informed every aspect of our clean water work.

FIGHTING LITTER AND HAVING FUN

Channelkeeper's Watershed Brigade



Addressing the plastic pollution problem takes a multipronged approach. While Channelkeeper works hard to support important regulation and legislation at local, state, and national levels to address plastic pollution, the Watershed Brigade is our boots-on-the-ground effort to prevent plastics and other trash from entering waterways and harming wildlife. Much more than a beautification effort, picking up trash is a way to prevent marine debris and keep microplastics out of the environment.

“Since the program launched a year ago, 318 people have joined and have removed more than 6,000 pounds of trash from areas between Gaviota and the Ventura River.”

The Watershed Brigade has become a vibrant volunteer community, and participation has grown significantly. Since the program launched a year ago, 318 people have joined and have removed more than 6,000 pounds of trash from areas between Gaviota and the Ventura River.

Each month we launch a new Challenge in which volunteers earn participation points that grant them entries into monthly raffles for fun prizes like kayak rentals and restaurant gift certificates. We also organize monthly dispersed clean-up events in which volunteers remove litter from dozens of locations over a single weekend.

In addition, the Watershed Brigade offers a Corporate Challenge for companies to get involved and a Community Service Credit program for students, so there are many ways to join the Brigade and make a positive impact while having fun! Check out our webpage (sbck.org/brigade), join our Facebook group (Channelkeeper's Watershed Brigade), grab some clean-up supplies, and become a part of our team!



6,354 lbs.
of Trash Removed



318
Volunteers Engaged



140
Sites Cleaned

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Ted Barsenas!

Ted Barsenas is an all-star Watershed Brigade volunteer. He served as camp host at Gaviota State Park from December 2020 to April 2021, and during that time he removed litter from the beaches and inspired his fellow campers to do their part too. We're incredibly grateful for volunteers like Ted, who take environmental stewardship to new heights, encourage others to take action, and have fun along the way.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO VOLUNTEER?

I've always found great personal satisfaction in knowing that I've contributed to a cause that supports the community. But more importantly, I believe giving back to the community sets an example for others in your life – your family, your friends, your associates – especially the youngest in your circle.

WHAT KIND OF ITEMS DO YOU FIND THE MOST?

Water and soda bottle caps in addition to microplastic and styrofoam.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE PLACE TO CLEAN-UP?

Port Hueneme Beach Park through Ormond Beach. It's home.

ANY WORDS OF WISDOM YOU FEEL LIKE SHARING WITH THE COMMUNITY?

John Muir said, "Keep close to Nature's heart...and break clear away, once in a while, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean." Organizations like Santa Barbara Channelkeeper help make this sort of spirit cleansing achievable and I really appreciate the work they do. It's important to recognize that our individual contribution, big or small, makes an impact and that little steps lead to leaps and bounds. Our children depend on it.



MPA WATCH – Community Science for Marine Conservation

MPA Watch is a network of programs in California that support healthy oceans through community science by collecting human use data in and around our marine protected areas (MPAs). Channelkeeper launched our MPA Watch program in 2011.

We recently wrapped up a review of 2020 MPA Watch data and are proud to share that our Santa Barbara MPA Watch program has conducted 5,000 transects since the program launched 10 years ago and has reached a new milestone.

MPA Watch volunteers observe and record offshore and onshore activities in and around MPAs, which help to improve our understanding of how people are using these new MPAs. Our team currently monitors the MPAs at Campus Point in Goleta and Naples and Kashtayit MPAs on the Gaviota Coast.

Becoming an MPA Watch volunteer is easy and fun! Channelkeeper hosts volunteer training workshops quarterly throughout the year that include a virtual classroom workshop followed by a field training session. If you enjoy long walks on the beach and marine conservation, we hope you'll consider joining us as an MPA Watch volunteer. Contact penny@sbck.org for more info.



PREVENTING AGRICULTURAL POLLUTION

Ongoing Advocacy to Protect Central Coast Waterways

Irrigated agriculture is the nation's number one source of pollution to rivers, streams, and groundwater supplies. Despite this fact, the agricultural industry is exempt from the Federal Clean Water Act. In California, agricultural pollution is regulated by the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board through a program previously known as the Ag Waiver. In April, the Regional Board reviewed and approved Ag Order 4.0, the latest iteration of the regional program that is supposed to protect our waterways from fertilizer and pesticide pollution.

Many farmers are committed to protecting water quality. However, in general, agricultural pollution is widespread and severe in the Central Coast Region. Though many farmers strive to utilize sustainable farming practices, a subset of egregious polluters do not, and they undermine our progress as a region. Based on the Regional Board's own findings, on average, farms apply an order of magnitude (10 X) more fertilizer than is safe to protect groundwater supplies. Forty-four percent of stream and river monitoring sites in agricultural watersheds exceed the drinking water standard for fertilizer pollution by two-fold or more, and this standard does not even begin to protect aquatic ecosystems from harm. In many areas, trends are worsening. Several waterways the Carpinteria and Goleta Valleys continue to suffer from agricultural pollution without any assurance that conditions will improve.

In 2015, Channelkeeper and our allies prevailed in a lawsuit challenging the adequacy of existing regulations that address agricultural pollution on the Central Coast. The Court agreed that the regulations failed to protect public health and the environment and directed the Regional Board to develop stronger regulations that require verification that farmers actually are achieving water quality standards within an established timeline.

Unfortunately, after years of development, the proposed Ag Order 4.0 fails to ensure that water quality will be protected and restored. Though the Order contains progressive new actions designed to protect waterways, its effectiveness is fatally undermined by loopholes and alternative compliance pathways designed by the agricultural industry to protect farmers who do pollute from accountability.



Channelkeeper is at the forefront of regional advocacy to support stronger state regulations to protect our waterways from contamination. We've tracked and influenced the development of state regulations related to agricultural pollution and monitoring implementation for over 15 years, providing a counter-balance to the multi-billion dollar agricultural industry's lobbying.

On April 14th, Channelkeeper testified at the adoption hearing to voice our disapproval, and the organization will continue its 16+ year campaign to protect Central Coast waterways from agricultural pollution as the issue progresses. This work continues to be one of our highest advocacy priorities.

STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON THE CHANNEL

Channelkeeper's 2021 Student Art Show

Channelkeeper's 18th annual ocean-inspired student art show, artist reception, and award ceremony took place on April 22, 2021, as part of the 2021 Virtual Santa Barbara Earth Day Festival Youth Leadership Day, hosted by the Community Environmental Council.

The goal of the show—which features artwork by high school students from across the South Coast—is to inspire local youth to create art that celebrates the Santa Barbara Channel, and for their art to inspire others in our community.

The theme, "What the Channel Means to Me," was especially resonant this year, since throughout the pandemic, so many young South Coast residents sought space and solace beside the ocean and experienced it through a different lens. The student art show provided a creative outlet for local young people to express their relationships with the Santa Barbara Channel.

California State Senator Monique Limón shared opening remarks prior to the award ceremony as part of the virtual reception and local artist Claudia Borfiga juried the show. Selected pieces won 1st, 2nd, 3rd, Honorable Mention, Environmental Ethic, and Juror's Choice awards along with cash prizes, thanks to the show's long-time sponsor, Trillium Enterprise, Inc.

The award-winning artwork is currently available on Channelkeeper's website in the Student Art Show's online gallery along with a recording of the student reception and award ceremony.

We'd like to congratulate all of the student artists and offer a huge thank you to everyone who helped make the show happen this year especially the art teachers and Community Environmental Council.



AWARD

NAME

SCHOOL

1ST PLACE

SYDNEY LONG

SANTA BARBARA HIGH SCHOOL

2ND PLACE

MOLLY GRANT

SAN MARCOS HIGH SCHOOL

3RD PLACE

GABRIELLA CRISA

SAN MARCOS HIGH SCHOOL

JUROR'S CHOICE

EMILY TURCIOS WRIGHT

DOS PUEBLOS HIGH SCHOOL

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC AWARD

VICTORIA MEJIA VEGA

SAN MARCOS HIGH SCHOOL

HONORABLE MENTION

ISH PRAJAPATI

DOS PUEBLOS HIGH SCHOOL

HONORABLE MENTION

JACKSON LECK

SAN MARCOS HIGH SCHOOL

FLOWS IN THE VENTURA RIVER

Keeping the River Alive



*F*lows in the Ventura River will once again reach critical levels following a winter and spring with record-setting low rainfall for much of the South Coast. Channelkeeper's interim settlement agreement with the City of Ventura will most likely make the difference of life and death for wildlife that depends on a flowing river for survival. Per our agreement, the City will begin shutting down its wells when flows reach critically low levels ensuring that some water remains in key sections of the river for as long as possible.

In the meantime, the City's adjudication of the watershed slowly moves forward. Channelkeeper is participating as a party in the adjudication to protect public trust resources. The City and other major pumpers in the watershed continue to advocate for the court to approve their proposed "Physical Solution" that would resolve the adjudication. The City's proposal, however, fails to address the very key issue at stake, which is to ensure that adequate flows are maintained in the river to protect endangered species and other wildlife and public trust resources.

While some parties look to rush the process, the long-term fate of the Ventura River is at stake, and it is critical that the outcome be based on credible science. To this end, the Department of Fish and Wildlife recently released its long-awaited Draft Flow Recommendations for the Ventura River. The Flow Recommendations are based on a multi-year study intended to indicate how much water is needed to maintain healthy aquatic habitat for endangered species and other wildlife. Channelkeeper submitted formal comments on the Draft Recommendations, and we will continue to track the process to ensure that the final outcome is based on sound, credible science.

CLEAN WATER FOR CALIFORNIA

The California Clean Water Act – Assembly Bill 377

In 1972 Congress passed the Clean Water Act, setting a goal to restore and maintain clean water in all of the nation's rivers, lakes, wetlands, and waterways by 1985. But today roughly 95% of all waterways in California are considered too polluted to safely swim, fish, and drink.

Our partners at California Coastkeeper Alliance and Assemblymember Robert Rivas recently introduced the California Clean Water Act (Assembly Bill 377) to put the state on track to eliminate impaired waterways and make all California waters drinkable, swimmable, and fishable by 2050.

Channelkeeper is pleased to support AB 377 and happy to announce that in April, AB 377 passed the Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety & Toxic Materials with a vote of 5-3.

If ultimately approved, AB 377, will change the way the State and Regional Water Boards enforce compliance with water quality standards and ensure that waterways are taken off the impaired list over time by:

- Requiring development of a plan to bring impaired waterways into compliance with water quality standards by 2050.
- Changing Water Board enforcement procedures, requiring them to spend more time and effort enforcing against the worst polluters instead of ignoring violations.
- Directing a larger portion of existing Water Board financial resources toward cleaning up impaired waterways, without imposing any new fees or costs.

The bill will require the State and Regional Water Boards to close permit loopholes, ensure that all dischargers are in compliance with water quality standards, and direct a larger proportion of existing funding toward cleaning up impaired waterways. The effects of this bill will be especially significant in underserved communities, where water is disproportionately likely to be polluted or even undrinkable.

Visit sbck.org/california-can-lead-the-fight-for-clean-water to learn more and read our blog post about the California Clean Water Act.



Support Sustainable Water Supplies - Water For Tomorrow

In our modern era of changing climate and increased drought, how we manage our water supplies can make the difference between thriving local ecosystems and depleted dead-zones. Channelkeeper is a local leader in advocating for sustainable water supplies. We work to ensure that our communities prioritize environmentally preferable approaches when providing for our water supply needs. We suggest that communities look to desalination, which can be environmentally impactful, only as a last resort when all other alternatives have been exhausted. We champion the pursuit of alternatives such as increased conservation, rainwater capture, and recycling and reuse of wastewater. Channelkeeper also tracks local management of our groundwater supplies to ensure that local aquifers are managed sustainably, and that stream and river flows are not depleted. This work cuts to the core of our mission to protect and restore our local watersheds and coastlines for the benefit of humans and wildlife.

Channelkeeper tracks and participates in processes underway to pursue sustainable groundwater management of the Upper Ventura River groundwater basin. Last fall and winter, staff members served on the City of Santa Barbara's Water Vision stakeholder panel, which worked to inform development of the City's water supply and management plan for the next 30 years. These processes are only a couple of examples of the ways that Channelkeeper serves to promote sustainable water supplies in our community.

TACKLING PLASTIC

Local Solutions to a Global Issue



Our planet is facing a crisis. Plastic pollution is a mounting global concern, and it has significant impacts locally, which is why reducing single-use plastic continues to be a major focus of Channelkeeper's work.

People often think of plastic pollution as just litter. However, plastic pollution is more than the trash that collects on our beaches. Plastic has severe consequences throughout its lifecycle. From oil drilling and refining to plastic production and waste, every stage is detrimental to human health, and these harmful processes have created a social justice crisis, since the most vulnerable, lower-income communities are often disproportionately affected.

“While ultimately the solutions to this global issue will require large-scale system changes in how we use and produce single-use plastic, we can take action locally to make changes as well.”

Plastics are poisoning our bodies through the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we grow and eat. Recent studies show that on average, each of us consumes a credit-card-sized amount of microplastics every week, carrying toxic chemicals such as carcinogens and endocrine disrupters.

Plastic is also a contributor to climate change. More than 99% of plastic is made from fossil fuels. Today, about 4-8% of annual global oil consumption is associated with plastics, according to the World Economic Forum. Plastic production is expected to more than double over the next three decades. If this reliance on plastics persists, plastics will account for 20% of oil consumption by 2050.

Channelkeeper continues to 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 policies to reduce single-use plastic and helping to set an example for the state. With studies predicting that plastic pollution in the ocean will likely triple over the next decade, we recognize the urgency of taking immediate action to address this crisis. Channelkeeper advocates for the development of legislative policies that support plastic reduction such as the federal **Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act** and **California State Assembly Bill 1276**.

While ultimately the solutions to this global issue will require large-scale system changes in how we use and produce single-use plastic, we can take action locally to make changes as well. Whether it's hosting beach and community clean-ups through the Watershed Brigade program, picking up marine debris, collecting film plastic as part of the Ablitt's Film Plastic recycling project, educating students about the impacts of plastic debris in our oceans, or advocating for policies that work to reduce single-use plastic closer to the source, Channelkeeper continues to focus on solutions to this issue.



BLUE WATER BALL



For over 20 years, springtime for Channelkeeper has been synonymous with Blue Water Ball. Each year our crew looks forward to gathering with our ocean-loving community to share in the year's successes and provide updates on our current work to protect the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds. This year's 2021 Blue Water Ball schedule is being modified due to continued COVID-related circumstances. Please stay tuned for updates on our Blue Water Ball, we will have early fall dates set soon. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact our Interim Executive Director, Ben Pitterle at ben@sbck.org.

We are so grateful for our community of supporters and hope you'll join us in the fall.

THANK YOU, DEBRA!



This spring we bid a fond farewell to our Development Director, Debra McCarty. After leading our donor relations and fundraising efforts for 3 years, Debra is moving on to new adventures. We're incredibly grateful for her hard work, commitment to our mission, and continued friendship. She will be missed by the entire Channelkeeper team but we know that she will continue to share her passion for clean water work with us as a volunteer with the Stream Team and the Watershed Brigade.

Keeping watch for clean water



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Santa Barbara, CA 93103

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