



Santa Barbara
CHANNELKEEPER®

SPRING/SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2023



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On the cover: Students participating in Channelkeeper's Sea and Shore Explorers Program enjoy a kayaking adventure in the Santa Barbara Harbor.



FROM THE HELM

Dear Channelkeeper Family,

This spring, the U.S. Supreme Court made two critical decisions about clean water and environmental safeguards. One protects California's coastal and marine ecosystems. The other jeopardizes millions of acres of the nation's wetlands. Both are inextricably linked to Channelkeeper's work.

I'll start with the excellent news. On June 5, the Supreme Court denied a request from the oil and gas industry to hear an appeal of a 2021 federal court decision that banned offshore fracking along California's coast. Santa Barbara Channelkeeper was a party in the lawsuit, represented by our talented colleagues at the Environmental Defense Center (EDC).

Fracking is dirty and destructive. Toxic chemicals that can harm and kill marine wildlife are used in the fracking process. An estimated 9 billion gallons of toxin-laden fracking wastewater are dumped into waterways each year. We were honored to join forces with the EDC to uphold environmental laws in order to protect wildlife, fisheries, and coastal communities from the risks associated with fracking activities.

Industry officials and federal agencies will most likely be back with updated offshore fracking plans and environmental assessments. When they do, Channelkeeper, along with many others, will be ready to defend the Channel and California's coastline.

On May 25, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a consequential ruling that rolls back protections for wetlands. Marshes, swamps, bogs, and other wetlands filter pollutants, store floodwaters, recharge groundwater, and provide important habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife. The Carpinteria Salt Marsh and Goleta Slough are two of our region's beloved wetlands and often areas of Channelkeeper fieldwork and community volunteer activities.

In its decision, the Court restricted the range of wetlands that are protected under the Clean Water Act. By doing so, it erased federal safeguards for up to one-half of the nation's wetlands. These wetlands are now at much greater risk of being filled in, dredged, and destroyed.

California officials have indicated that state law will continue to protect our wetlands. However, California law does not allow for citizen enforcement, which is a critical feature of the Clean Water Act used by Channelkeeper, public interest attorneys, and others to protect water quality.

Channelkeeper is part of an alliance of more than 300 waterkeeper groups, most based in the United States. With our colleagues and others, we will be urging Congress to reestablish the clean water protections undermined by the Court's wetlands ruling. We will keep you posted!

Best,
Ted

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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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WATERSHED BRIGADE

Working Together to Tackle Marine Debris

Since its launch in 2020, the Watershed Brigade, Channelkeeper's trash-fighting community program, has demonstrated impressive results and has proven that great things happen when individuals pitch in and work together.

While often focused on smaller items such as plastics and microtrash, this spring Watershed Brigade volunteers addressed derelict fishing gear. Volunteers rolled up their sleeves and removed over 2,300 pounds of lobster traps and marine debris that had washed ashore on two beaches: a remote beach on Santa Cruz Island and a local beach between Leadbetter and Mesa Lane. When it reaches shore, fishing gear can accumulate and become embedded in sand, causing hazards to both beachgoers and wildlife.



As efforts to better understand and minimize this source of marine debris are underway by state wildlife agencies and fishermen, Channelkeeper is activating the Watershed Brigade and partnering with other groups to remove derelict gear from local beaches.



With funding from The Santa Barbara Foundation, we were able to partner with Island Packers and Santa Barbara Adventure Company in March to transport thirty volunteers to Pink Ribbon Beach on Santa Cruz Island. We were able to remove 1,560 pounds of marine debris, mostly in the form of derelict lobster traps, from this remote island location.

In April, we partnered for a third consecutive year with Chris Voss and the Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara to clean up a beach *hot spot*. This year, we concentrated our efforts on a two-mile stretch of beach between Leadbetter and Mesa Lane. On a Saturday morning, twenty-three volunteers helped remove more than thirty lobster traps that had washed up this winter due to intense storms.

To join the Watershed Brigade for exciting opportunities such as these, visit our webpage (sbck.org/brigade), join our Facebook Group (Channelkeeper's Watershed Brigade), or follow us on Instagram (@Watershedbrigade).



26,387 lbs.
of Trash Removed



1,152
Volunteers Engaged



784
Sites Cleaned

Cumulative statistics since May 2020.

ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

Protecting the Channel from the Impacts of Aquaculture



There is growing interest among federal agencies to authorize offshore aquaculture projects in the Santa Barbara Channel.

Channelkeeper is concerned about the impacts of aquaculture development and is actively monitoring federal efforts to permit aquaculture operations in the Santa Barbara Channel. Channelkeeper is urging federal agencies to thoroughly research the ecological, social, and economic risks and benefits of new aquaculture projects and to develop a robust regulatory framework that includes standards and compliance measures to minimize environmental impacts on both water quality and marine life before projects are put in place.

Last fall, Channelkeeper joined the Center for Food Safety, other environmental organizations, fishermen associations, and the Quinalt Indian Nation in suing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers over its issuance of Nationwide Permit 56, which authorizes the installation of finfish farming structures such as cages, net pens, anchors, floats, and buoys, in state and federal waters. We are challenging that the approval of this general permit was made without a thorough analysis of its potential detrimental impacts on our ocean ecosystems, water quality, public health, fishing communities, and

endangered and threatened species and without adequate consultation with fish and wildlife agencies.

In addition, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is proposing eight sites in the Santa Barbara Channel as possible "Aquaculture Opportunity Areas" for future aquaculture development, including offshore finfish operations. There will be opportunities for the public to weigh in later this year.

While research shows that certain types of aquaculture projects such as those for shellfish and seaweed generally may have benefits that outweigh the drawbacks, others such as offshore finfish aquaculture operations present significant risks to the environment. Potential impacts to the marine ecosystem include water quality impairment from dead fish, fecal waste, chemicals, and antibiotics; the spread of diseases; the escape of farmed fish into the natural environment; and the depletion of small fish populations used to feed the farmed fish.

In addition, there is currently no adequate permit program in place to regulate aquaculture operations in federal waters or strong standards to protect the marine environment from the impacts of finfish aquaculture.

CRUISE SHIPS

Recommendations for Critical City Program Improvements

Throughout the past year, community members have asked crucial questions about cruise ships at the City of Santa Barbara's Harbor Commission Cruise Ship Subcommittee meetings. These questions range from, "Why are cruise ships with failing environmental grades allowed to anchor off Santa Barbara's shores?" to "Why are vessels with substandard technologies able to visit, putting the Channel's wildlife, delicate ecosystems, and public health at risk?"

Channelkeeper is advocating for firmer program guidelines, asking the City of Santa Barbara to examine the environmental impacts of the cruise ship industry and to better align its program with the City's environmental goals and commitments and community priorities.

A central point of concern is the fact that cruise ships generate enormous volumes of waste. Every day a typical cruise ship generates approximately 285,000 gallons of wastewater, seven tons of solid waste, fifteen gallons of toxic scrubber waste chemicals (outside of California), and air pollution equal to that of 12,000 cars.

At May's subcommittee meeting, the City's Waterfront Department staff provided its recommendations for cruise ship program improvements. While the suggestions included some positive changes, Channelkeeper believes that a stronger programmatic framework must be put in place that is protective of the environment and the health of our communities.



Therefore, Executive Director Ted Morton presented additional recommendations in June for the Harbor Commission to consider. These more definitive program improvements involve reducing and capping the number of visiting ships, ensuring that ships that visit Santa Barbara have state-of-the-art technology and a record of environmental compliance, and maintaining community engagement in the program.

The Harbor Commission instructed its subcommittee to work to incorporate and align Channelkeeper's recommendations with those offered by the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council and the Waterfront Department in one comprehensive plan before presenting a final proposal to the Santa Barbara City Council.



MARINE CONSERVATION

Reflecting on the Benefits of Marine Protected Areas

Fifty years ago, Dr. Tom Mickel dove Naples Reef more than one hundred times while working on his Ph.D. in biology at UCSB. In the quiet, early morning hours, Mickel and his roommate put their boat in the water at Goleta Pier and motored north to explore a wild stretch of the coast.

“We never saw any people there, not divers nor fishermen. Nobody,” writes Mickel. “At that time, there was no map of Naples Reef or names for different areas, and we would locate it by triangulating off points on the land and location of kelp. That never failed. But some people thought we were nuts going there without any kind of communications or a backup motor.”

The unusual formations and incredible biodiversity drew them back time and time again. “We had seal encounters, gray whales surfacing right next to our 16’ boat, visits from very nosy electric rays, and [we saw] lots of Cabazon,” Mickel recalls.

Naples Reef, located on the Gaviota Coast just north of Santa Barbara, is a complex underwater pinnacle and cave system, which combined with the mixing of nutrient-rich currents, forms a unique, exceptionally productive habitat that is home to a spectacular kelp forest teeming with fish and wildlife. Today, divers may find arches and ledges filled with colorful anemones, nudibranchs, and cowries, along with reef fish like kelp bass, sheephead, and even the occasional white sea bass or yellowtail. Marine mammals including sea lions and harbor seals are also frequent visitors.

In 2012, Naples Reef was designated by California’s Department of Fish and Wildlife as a Marine Protected Area, or MPA, ensuring that its unique geologic formations and rich ecosystems are conserved for future generations to explore and enjoy.

Just as parks on land protect special lands and wildlife from overdevelopment, MPAs are underwater parks that conserve important ecosystems. When the Marine Life Protection Act was passed by California legislators in 1999, it called on the State to create a network of Marine

Protected Areas to safeguard the long-term health of California’s marine life. MPAs at the northern Channel Islands were implemented in 2003 while Southern California’s MPAs were established in 2012.

These areas have been called “hope spots” because of their role in restoring the beauty and bounty of ocean life threatened by overfishing, pollution, and habitat destruction. Scientific studies have shown that MPAs help restore depleted fish and wildlife populations.

The Santa Barbara Channel includes a network of nineteen MPAs, five along the coast and fourteen surrounding the Northern Channel Islands. Each MPA was designated to set aside a special area of the marine environment to create a robust network of protection covering over 350 square miles throughout the state.

Channelkeeper was involved in the process of developing the Southern California MPA network. Today, we monitor these special areas through our MPA Watch program and we work to raise public awareness and promote stewardship of our MPAs. In an effort to share the underwater experience with more diverse audiences, Channelkeeper created a series of interactive MPA dive maps and videos of key underwater sites. The Naples Dive Map features six videos exploring Naples Reef.

After watching these underwater videos, Mickel recently wrote, “I can recall all the terrain shown in your videos and they brought back some great memories. We loved diving there and had many unbelievable experiences on the reef. Thanks for the great memories.”

His perspective makes us deeply grateful that this special place is now protected. We invite you to take a virtual visit to Naples MPA through our interactive dive map and video series or explore them firsthand.

We hope you will join Channelkeeper in supporting California’s Marine Protected Areas and safeguarding our marine resources for future generations.

View the dive map videos here:



SEA AND SHORE EXPLORERS PROGRAM

Students Learn on the Water

It happens every time. Exhilarated shouts erupt from students the moment they seat themselves in ocean kayaks. In an instant, the noise shifts to amazed gasps as they paddle from shore and begin exploring the ocean's surface. Sometimes a curious seal will appear. Other times, pelicans glide overhead. For many students, this is a new experience. Wonder illuminates their faces.

Channelkeeper's Sea and Shore Explorers program brings environmental science to local elementary and middle school students. The program combines three experiential components: classroom watershed education, hands-on marine biology exploration at the Sea Center, and a kayaking adventure in the Santa Barbara Harbor. This combined approach connects students with the natural world, helps orient them within their watershed, and gives them an opportunity to interact with it.

"My 5th-grade students had a lot of fun participating in Channelkeeper's Sea and Shore Explorers Program," said McKinley Elementary School teacher Blanca Alvarez Sanchez. "Students were able to experience the concepts that they learned about in class firsthand. I believe the program was great and helpful for all of the students. One of the highlights was the mini-lesson about our local watersheds and water quality the students got before the field trip."

This spring, six classes enjoyed exploring the Santa Barbara Harbor on Sea and Shore Explorers program adventures, thanks in part to support from the California

Coastal Commission's WHALE TAIL® Grants Program. They saw harbor seals on the bait dock and sea lions on the entrance buoy, learned about bryozoans and coastal marine ecosystems at the Sea Center, and discussed the importance of keeping our watershed clean as they kayaked.

Science comes to life when students are able to get a closer look at local wildlife that relies on clean water. Pollution becomes personal as they trace the path that water takes through their community to the ocean. This unique on-the-water perspective brings awareness to the impacts of their actions on water quality. It also can leave a lasting impression.



20TH ANNUAL STUDENT ART SHOW

Creativity and Environmental Consciousness

Art has the power to change the world. That’s the inspiration behind Channelkeeper’s Student Art Show. Each year, high school students from Carpinteria to Goleta are invited to create and submit their interpretations of what the Santa Barbara Channel means to them and to express their personal connection to the natural world through color, texture, line, and shape.


While the creative process provides an opportunity for deep personal growth, the resulting artwork has a beautiful impact within the community, expanding environmental awareness, sparking important conversations, and inspiring our community to protect the beauty and biodiversity of the Santa Barbara Channel.

This year represents the twentieth anniversary of the Student Art Show. In honor of this milestone, Michael Irwin and Judith Raimondi, who for many years supported the show as art teachers, juried the show and selected the award-winning pieces. County Supervisor Laura Capps presented the awards at a ceremony held at Jodi House Gallery on May 4th. The artwork is on display via a photo gallery on Channelkeeper’s website.

Over the past two decades, more than 4,000 students have submitted artwork to the Student Art Show. Channelkeeper is honored to have worked with these young people and their teachers to provide an opportunity for students to express themselves and inspire meaningful change through art.

We’d like to express our gratitude to the show’s sponsors, Trillium Enterprises and the Goleta City Grant Program, for their generous support and offer heartfelt congratulations to all of the student artists.

View the winning artwork here:




First-place winner
Lucy London



AWARD	STUDENT	SCHOOL
1st Place	Lucy London	San Marcos High School
2nd Place	Alexis Botella	San Marcos High School
3rd Place	Elina Lopez Garza	Dos Pueblos High School
Environmental Ethic	Julia Medina	San Marcos High School
Jurors’ Choice	Noelle Gerthoffer	San Marcos High School
Jurors’ Choice	Sofia Sasseen	San Marcos High School
Honorable Mention	Aislinn Kisner	Dos Pueblos High School
Honorable Mention	Anneliese Oprea	Dos Pueblos High School
Honorable Mention	Lucia Wolf	San Marcos High School



2023 BLUE WATER BALL

A Festive Evening of Fundraising

Channelkeeper was thrilled to bring supporters together on May 7th for the Blue Water Ball, an elegant and engaging evening celebrating the organization's clean-water accomplishments and positive community impact.

The Cabrillo Pavilion's oceanside setting provided clear views of the Santa Barbara Channel that guests admired while enjoying cocktails on the terraces, connecting with friends, and making new ones. Photographer Branden Aroyan's large-scale aquatic art installations and jazz from the Dave Vignoe Trio and keyboardist Mel McGary complemented the coastal ambiance.

Chumash elder and firekeeper Art Cisneros began the evening's program with a heartfelt blessing in Chumash and English honoring the ocean, sky, and community. During the dinner hour, emcee Geoff Green entertained with lively auction commentary, while guests enjoyed

a delicious three-course meal. Executive Director Ted Morton welcomed everyone with an insightful overview of Channelkeeper's work and Dr. Benjamin Halpern, Director of UCSB's National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis, delivered a keynote address on his research projects.

The event was successful in raising more than \$130,000 in funds that will make it possible for Channelkeeper to protect local beaches, creeks, and coast, and defend the community's right to clean water and healthy habitats through a wide range of programs, including field work in creeks and coastal waters, organizing community cleanups, providing educational experiences for local students, and advocating for protective environmental policies.

We are grateful to everyone who made the Blue Water Ball such a successful and inspiring evening. We hope you will join us at the 2024 Blue Water Ball!



Clockwise L to R: Ted Morton, Dr. Benjamin Halpern, Geoff Green; Tim and Talli Robinson; Art Cisneros; Tara Zahraie, Hana Subrahmanyam, and Brynn Campos

Photography by Neil Campbell

MANY THANKS TO OUR BLUE WATER BALL SUPPORTERS

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Mimi deGruy, Terry Kleid, Holly Sherwin.

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Honorary Committee Members:

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Volunteers

Elizabeth Armstrong, Brynn Campos, Ellen Chase, Dennis Johns, Amine Kousba, Andrew Palacios, Hana Subrahmanyam, Nina Timofeyeva, Tara Zahraie; Sunrise Rotary volunteers Scott Burns, Ellen Chase, Dennis Johns, Oscar Zavala; and Montecito Bank & Trust volunteers Brianna Aguilar, Taylor Fraker, Tom Hoffman, Michael Rosales.

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STAFF CHANGES:

BENJAMIN PITTERLE

In February, Channelkeeper wished Science and Policy Director Ben Pitterle a fond farewell as he moved on to a new professional role after seventeen years with the organization. Ben's drive to do good in the world—to take a stand on important issues and speak up for vulnerable people, places, and organisms—continues to inspire us. He leaves behind a legacy of powerful environmental work. Over the years he has fought for stronger ocean protections, helped develop policies to address harmful agricultural pollution, championed Channelkeeper's work to improve flows in the Ventura River, advocated for limitations on cruise ship visits,



and helped create a thriving volunteer cleanup corps called the Watershed Brigade. We thank him for putting his heart and soul into these projects that will benefit our communities for decades to come.

VERONICA MORAN

Channelkeeper is delighted to welcome Veronica Moran to our team as a part-time administrative assistant. In addition to her friendly, can-do approach and passion for environmental science, Veronica brings professional experience and a strong work ethic. She will be supporting Channelkeeper's clean water work by helping with community outreach, administrative duties, and monitoring fieldwork. We are fortunate to have her on our team!





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KEEPING WATCH FOR CLEAN WATER

VOLUNTEER WITH US!



Channelkeeper relies on the generous gift of time and support from volunteers to help achieve our mission. Join the Watershed Brigade to help keep local watersheds and beaches clean or monitor marine protected areas along our coast as an MPA Watch volunteer. Find out more here: <https://bit.ly/38sK86l>

WE'RE GROWING!



Santa Barbara Channelkeeper is seeking a Development Director. This person will serve as the organization's principal fundraising strategist and will be responsible for implementing or supervising fundraising programs, including the annual fund, major gifts, planned giving, fundraising events, grants, and capital/special gifts campaigns. Candidates should be passionate about the mission and work of Santa Barbara Channelkeeper and enthusiastic about fundraising. Read the full job description here: <https://tinyurl.com/yvsjfe54>