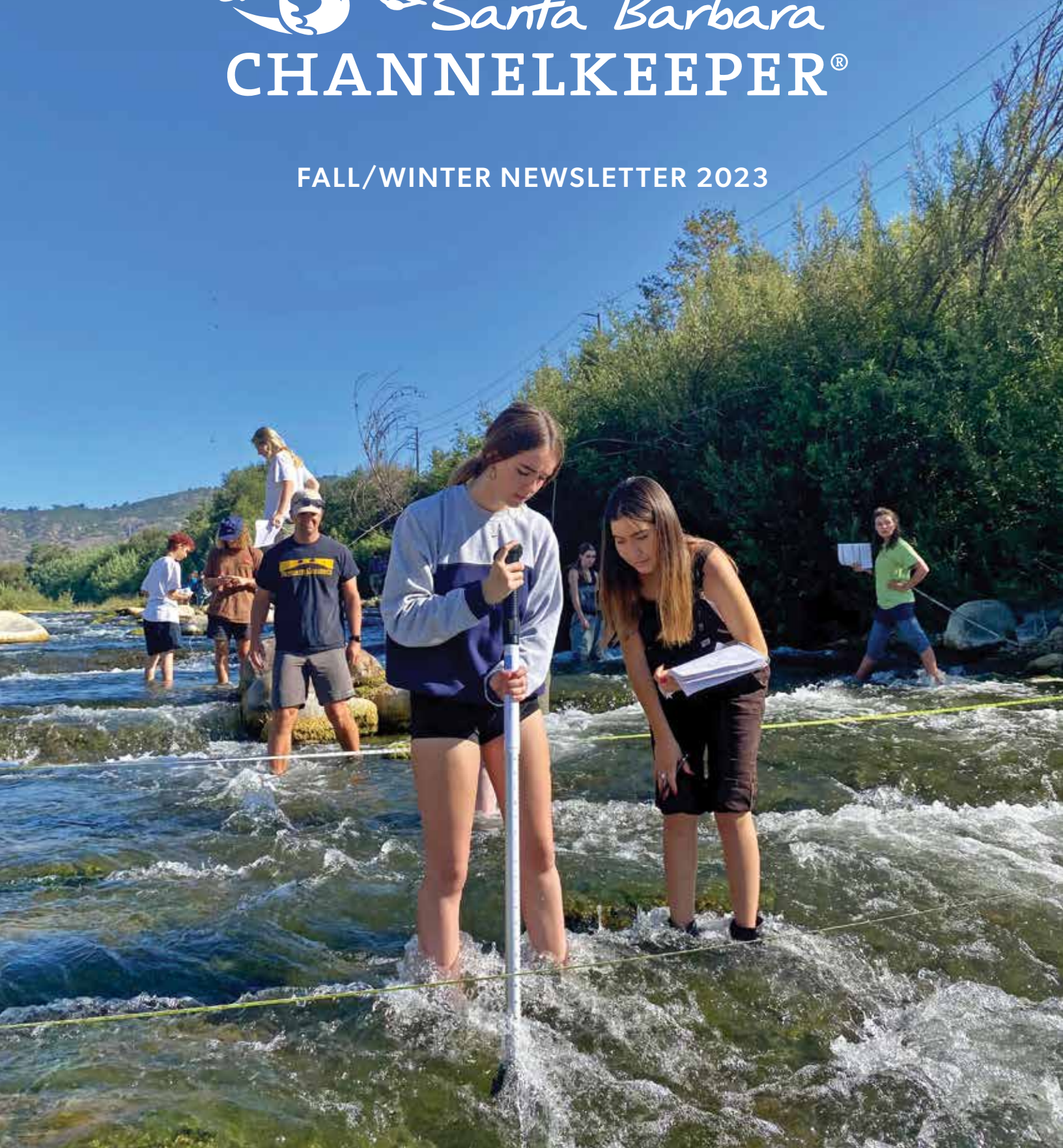




*Santa Barbara*  
**CHANNELKEEPER®**

FALL/WINTER NEWSLETTER 2023



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**On the cover:** Students from Ventura High School's Field Studies class calculate flow levels in the Ventura River.



# FROM THE HELM

Dear Channelkeeper Family,

2024 promises to be an exciting time for Santa Barbara Channelkeeper.

Last year, Channelkeeper’s board and staff completed a new strategic framework to guide our work over the next five years. Our team will use this document to chart our future efforts and to advance our mission as a powerful, effective voice for clean water and healthy habitats.

The plan builds on the strength of our education, community stewardship, and advocacy programs and it outlines five strategic goals that will help us prioritize key projects and initiatives. 2024 will be the first full year of Channelkeeper’s implementation of this plan and we’re excited to embark on its meaningful trajectory.

Educating the next generation of environmental leaders is one of Channelkeeper’s core priorities. The strategic framework advances our work to connect local students with the Channel and to inspire them to care for it. We are delighted to renew our Sea to Shore Explorer program this spring after a successful pilot in 2022 and 2023. Through this program, we provide a combination of classroom instruction on water quality testing, kayak adventures in the Santa Barbara Harbor, and exploration at the Sea Center. Students enjoy the experiential nature of this program and for many, it provides the opportunity to enjoy coastal waters and see marine life for the very first time.

Guided by the strategic framework’s advocacy objectives, Channelkeeper is currently leading the community effort to improve the City of Santa Barbara’s cruise ship program. Channelkeeper and others are calling on the City to set a cap of no more than 18 annual cruise ship visits, insist that ships use advanced technologies that protect air and water quality, prioritize the ships with the best environmental records, and reduce vessel speeds as the ships transit the Channel to prevent whale strikes. We expect the City to make key decisions in 2024 about the future of cruise ships in Santa Barbara and we invite you to join our advocacy efforts at [www.sbck.org/cruise-ship-advocacy](http://www.sbck.org/cruise-ship-advocacy). Learn about how you can get involved and sign up to receive updates.

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.**

**714 Bond Avenue  
Santa Barbara, CA 93103  
tel 805.563.3377  
[info@sbck.org](mailto:info@sbck.org) [sbck.org](http://sbck.org)**



# WATERSHED BRIGADE

## Every Piece of Trash Counts

This September, on International Coastal Cleanup Day there were more than 600 organized cleanup events along the California coast. Channelkeeper hosted two of them at West Beach and Tajiguas Beach. More than eighty Watershed Brigade volunteers cleared trash from these beaches as part of the larger effort.

At West Beach, where more than sixty volunteers collected eighty-three pounds of trash, some of the youngest volunteers reminded us that small actions yield big results when it comes to cleaning up the environment.

"I found all of this trash and an action figure!" shouted a sandy-legged child with a bucket. "That means that a fish won't eat it," she said, holding up the plastic toy.



A few miles up the coast, at Tajiguas Beach, nineteen volunteers removed 197 pounds of trash, including cigarette butts, plastic water bottle caps, wrappers, and fishing gear that they were able to keep out of the ocean and the food chain.

"Every piece of trash that is taken away to be recycled or deposited in a landfill

means there is one less dangerous item for birds, turtles or whales to swallow," explains the United Nations Environment Programme about the efficacy of community efforts. "Cleanups also restore these creatures' habitats."

Since 2020, the Watershed Brigade, Channelkeeper's trash-fighting community program, has demonstrated the positive impact that humans can have on our environment. With every bucket load of trash collected, this group effort demonstrates that together we can reduce trash and limit its pollution of our environment.

To join the Watershed Brigade, visit our webpage ([sbck.org/brigade](http://sbck.org/brigade)), join our Facebook Group (Channelkeeper's Watershed Brigade), or follow us on Instagram (@Watershedbrigade).



28,097 lbs.  
of Trash Removed



1,152  
Volunteers Engaged



844  
Sites Cleaned

Cumulative statistics since May 2020.

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

## Expanding and Strengthening Our Conservation Work



**A**iming to intensify efforts to protect the Santa Barbara Channel and the surrounding watersheds, Channelkeeper's board of directors and staff have developed a new strategic framework to guide the organization's conservation work over the next five years.

This new plan will allow Channelkeeper to build upon its legacy of effective clean water work, focus more attention on the impacts of climate change in our community, and better address present-day and future threats to the Santa Barbara Channel. The plan will also enable the organization to invest in critical staff needs and infrastructure and expand its work to engage more people across diverse communities.

To learn more about our strategic framework, visit: <https://www.sbck.org/strategic-framework/> or scan the QR code.

Scan to read the complete strategic framework.



### STRATEGIC GOALS:



1. Defend the right to clean water and protect the health of the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds.



2. Avoid and minimize adverse impacts to the Santa Barbara Channel from commercialization.



3. Build awareness and resilience to the impacts of climate change in the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds.



4. Inspire community engagement and stewardship for the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds.



5. Build organizational health, capacity, and sustainability.

# ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

## Support for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary

Lisamu', or Morro Rock, is considered one of the most notable cultural sites on the Central Coast. Indigenous peoples have gathered there in ceremony over centuries, and it is revered as a Sacred Heritage Site by the Chumash.

In 2015, the Northern Chumash Tribal Council nominated approximately 7,500 square miles of coastal and offshore waters as a potential National Marine Sanctuary to protect important cultural areas—including Lisamu' and vital habitat for whales, sea turtles, sea birds, and other marine life.

In August, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released a draft Sanctuary designation proposal and management plan for public comment. NOAA eliminated about 2,000 square miles of the originally proposed offshore area—from Montaña de Oro State Park to Cambria—in order to allow for offshore wind power transmission cables to come to shore without transiting through Sanctuary waters.

However, keeping the initially proposed area in the Sanctuary boundary would lead to more careful planning to ensure offshore wind operators mitigate impacts to sensitive marine areas, species, and important cultural areas. NOAA's proposal would remove contiguous protection of offshore waters between Monterey Bay and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuaries which was a key part of the original proposal, abandoning a critical opportunity to connect the three areas and maximize conservation of marine waters, wildlife, and habitats.

The Northern Chumash Tribal Council and environmental groups like Channelkeeper submitted comments to NOAA in October, asking the agency to designate the largest sanctuary possible, as originally proposed by the Council, in addition to new areas along the Gaviota



Map shows the initial boundary proposed by the Northern Chumash Tribal Council and supported by Channelkeeper.

Coast, which would strengthen protection for these waters and establish important connectivity between the national marine sanctuaries. We also asked for effective safeguards to reduce or prevent harmful activities within the sanctuary.

Channelkeeper invited members of the community to show their support for the sanctuary by submitting comments to NOAA. In addition, Channelkeeper staff visited two local schools and helped students express their views in support of the sanctuary through letters and drawings that were mailed to NOAA. A total of 98,000 comments were submitted during the public comment period. A final decision is expected in 2024.

# PARTNERS IN RESEARCH

## An Interview with Scientist Dr. Jayme Smith

Jayme Smith, PhD, studies the ecology of harmful algal blooms in California as a senior scientist in the Biogeochemistry Department at the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project. Channelkeeper has supported her research by collecting offshore water samples.

Harmful algal blooms, also known as HABs, are certain types of fast-growing algae that can be harmful to the environment. Some algae produce toxins that can cause fish kills and habitat loss, as well as making humans and animals sick.

Dr. Smith's research focuses on *Pseudo-nitzschia*, a type of marine algae that produces the neurotoxin domoic acid. She hopes to better understand the conditions in the environment that favor the development of domoic acid producing HABs and the negative impacts that domoic acid can have on our local ecosystem and human health.

### **Why is studying harmful algal blooms important?**

Harmful algal blooms can occur when the balance in an ecosystem is shifted and creates a set of optimal conditions for a harmful species of algae to grow. This can happen due to changes in weather conditions, ocean circulation, or changes in the season. There are also potential influences from human activity, like changes in water temperature from climate change or nutrient pollution. We don't fully know how all these factors influence HAB formation. I think it is important to untangle these influences as much as possible so that we can minimize the frequency of HABs.

### **How has Channelkeeper supported your work?**

Channelkeeper has been an excellent partner in collaborative HABs research over the last few years. Channelkeeper has responded to local HAB events by helping us get samples out in the Channel onboard the RV *Channelkeeper* to better understand both the spatial extent and intensity of some recent blooms. Sometimes, HAB events are centered a few miles offshore, so sampling at shore-based stations essentially "misses" the bloom. The samples that Channelkeeper collects during events are critical and otherwise very difficult for researchers to obtain. There are very few research vessels that can mobilize as quickly as Channelkeeper to sample bloom events.



### **What conclusions, if any, can you draw from your work so far?**

Channelkeeper has collaborated to collect samples during two recent bloom events that sickened hundreds of sea lions and dolphins. We're still working to understand the causes and overall impact of these events, but the samples that Channelkeeper helped us collect are helping to put the puzzle pieces together. For example, the bloom that occurred in 2022 was completely missed by our shore-based station. The

samples collected aboard the RV *Channelkeeper* are some of the only observations of that event and helped researchers understand the location and intensity of the bloom.

### **Are there any insights specific to the Santa Barbara Channel that you have observed?**

The Santa Barbara Channel, unfortunately, is a 'hotspot' for domoic acid producing HABs. Observational work in the Channel, that has been a collaborative effort of multiple HAB researchers in southern California, has



suggested that multiple factors, including the ocean circulation patterns in the area, can really favor the growth of lots of toxin producing *Pseudo-nitzschia* and result in some record high concentrations of domoic acid. Some of the highest reported concentrations of domoic acid in the world have occurred in the Santa Barbara Channel.

### **What does this work mean to you personally?**

I have always had a passion for the environment and want to be a good environmental steward. I have also always loved to learn! I've been fortunate to turn these passions into a research career. In my work, I get to explore new ideas, ask important questions, and work collaboratively to try to find answers. HABs in particular are really important to me because they represent the intersection of some very interesting research questions with important implications for both human and ecosystem health.

# AGRICULTURAL POLLUTION

## Advocating for Environmental Protections

**N**itrate contamination is widespread and increasing along the Central Coast. Nitrates can cause serious health problems including cancer, thyroid disease, and methemoglobinemia, or “blue baby syndrome.” Drinking water supplies and waterways in many communities of color in the Central Coast region are heavily contaminated by nitrate fertilizers.

In 2021, the Central Coast Regional Water Board approved a regulatory order (Ag Order 4.0) that would have established limits on nitrogen use among growers that excessively apply chemical nitrate fertilizers. This order would have improved accountability among growers by restricting how much nitrate could be applied on fields and eventually leached into groundwater or discharged into rivers and creeks.

The State Water Resources Control Board reviewed the order. At a September 2023 State Board meeting, Channelkeeper staff joined representatives of several environmental, environmental justice, and fishing organizations, in addition to affected community members, to urge the State Board to protect public health and water quality by maintaining accountability through the limits.

However, the State Board decided to strike down these limits and required that the Regional Board approve a new order without enforceable limits.

The State Board also upheld a portion of the Regional Board’s Ag Order 4.0 that failed to take additional measures to establish more vegetated buffer areas between agricultural fields and nearby streams, rivers, and wetlands despite finding that these efforts would be important to protect water quality.

On October 27th, Channelkeeper joined a coalition of environmental organizations, Latino and farmworker community groups, and fishing organizations in filing a lawsuit against the Water Boards, challenging their decisions on enforceable limits and buffer areas.

“For decades, state water agencies have known about the substantial pollution problems caused by excessive nitrate fertilizer and pesticides, but too little action has been taken,” says Ted Morton. “We are proud to be part of a diverse coalition continuing to advocate for community health and water quality protections along the Central Coast.”





# EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Inspiring Future Environmental Scientists

This fall, the Ventura River was still flowing, thanks to a series of storms that brought significant rainfall to Southern California the previous winter. For Ventura High School students in Field Studies class, these flow levels provided the perfect opportunity for some exciting scientific exploration.

“How can we calculate how much water is flowing right now?” Channelkeeper’s Education and Outreach Director Penny Owens asked the group. Five hands shot up as students waded into the rushing water. They measured the width, depth, and average velocity of the stream using flowmeters and a meter tape.

Every Thursday during the fall months, Owens trains students from Ventura High School in water quality monitoring with classroom lessons and fieldwork at sites along the Ventura River.

The students learn practical skills, such as how to calibrate water quality meters. They have an opportunity to set up and deploy data loggers that collect continuous dissolved

oxygen and temperature data. They also learn about the parameters of their data collection for dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity, turbidity, bacteria, and flow rate insights.

“It’s one thing to read about water quality in a textbook. It’s another thing entirely to get your feet wet, gather data from the rivers in our backyard, and make inferences about the world around us,” notes Ventura High School environmental and biological sciences teacher, Jared McEntyre.

Following in-the-field data collection, the students are able to analyze and interpret the data to see if the different sites meet the water quality objectives for the Ventura River.

Time spent on the water helps these young people connect with the natural world, orienting them in relation to their watershed and allowing them to interact with it. Students can see and touch some of the organisms that rely on clean water and see firsthand the path that water takes through their community to the ocean. This brings awareness to the impacts of their everyday actions on water quality. It also brings science to life.



# SUPPORTER APPRECIATION

October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023

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(\$10,000 and up)

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Williams

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 Kenneth Volk Vineyards  
 Coco LaForge  
 Melville Winery  
 Montecito Bank & Trust  
 Patagonia  
 Patagonia Provisions  
 Rivahil Winery  
 Riviera Towel Company  
 Santa Barbara Company  
 Santa Barbara Independent  
 Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History  
 Santa Barbara Sea Center  
 SeaVeas  
 Storm Wines  
 Sunstone Winery  
 Sunswept Sailing  
 Surf Happens  
 SurfPack Gear  
 Sweetzer Cellars  
 Tent Merchant  
 Shaun Tomson  
 Trader Joe's  
 Walden Surfboards  
 World Surf League

**Nate Irwin Joins Channelkeeper**



We're pleased to announce that Nate Irwin has joined the Channelkeeper team. Nate Irwin came aboard in September as a Policy Associate. He holds a master's degree in environmental advocacy for social justice and sustainability from Antioch New England. In addition to his passion for

environmental science, Nate brings policy development and community organizing skills, creativity, and ebullient positive energy to the post. As a Santa Barbara native, he also brings a wealth of local knowledge. He will be leading the charge on many of Channelkeeper's advocacy campaigns and environmental policy programs.

**Welcome to the Board**



Channelkeeper welcomes Nancy Kogevinas to the Board of Directors. Nancy is a realtor with Berkshire Hathaway, a native Californian, a Montecito resident, and an avid lover of our ocean and the Santa Barbara Channel. She graduated from UCLA with a degree in economics and worked

as a marketing and advertising executive with *Time* and *The New Yorker* magazines in a previous career. Nancy has been representing buyers and sellers along the Central Coast since the early 2000s and has been ranked in the top three for all Santa Barbara realtors every year for the last 5 years.



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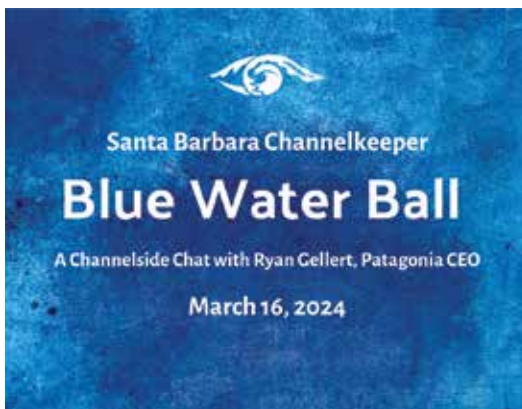
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## KEEPING WATCH FOR CLEAN WATER

### CELEBRATE WITH US!



We hope you will join us for Channelkeeper's Blue Water Ball on March 16, 2024, at the Cabrillo Pavilion. The Blue Water Ball is Channelkeeper's most important fundraising event of the year, gathering support for the protection of the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds. Always an exciting and memorable event, the event brings together activists, civic leaders, scientists, water sports enthusiasts, and many other environmentally conscious community members who care about the protection of the waterways and beaches that make this one of the most beautiful coastal communities on earth. We're delighted to share that Ryan Gellert, CEO of Patagonia, will be joining us as an inspired and thought-provoking speaker, and Santa Barbara luminary Andrew Firestone will emcee.

## KEEPING SANTA BARBARA BEAUTIFUL



Channelkeeper was awarded the Playa de Santa Barbara Award for environmental stewardship at this year's 59th Annual Santa Barbara Beautiful awards ceremony on October 1st. Channelkeeper was honored to accept the award during a ceremony and reception at the Music Academy of the West in Montecito. The award includes a plaque and commemorative tree, to be planted in Channelkeeper's name in the coming year in downtown Santa Barbara.