



Santa Barbara
CHANNELKEEPER®

SPRING/SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2025



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On the cover: Former water quality intern Aaron Garcia collects samples from Lower Glen Annie Creek.

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper acknowledges that the creeks, rivers, estuaries, coast, and ocean that we work to protect and restore are unceded lands and waters of the Chumash peoples and Indigenous people. We recognize the traumatic history of colonization and erasure that has dispossessed the Chumash from their homelands and waters. We strive to care for these vibrant and meaningful places alongside the Chumash and Indigenous communities, to deepen our relationships, and work together to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds for generations to come.



FROM THE HELM

Dear Channelkeeper Family,

The Santa Barbara Channel is one of the special places in the world where one can in the same moment see tidepools teeming with life and migratory whales breaching just offshore. It is one of the most biodiverse marine regions in the world. But our beloved Channel is also under serious threat.

The weakening of federal environmental protections through proposed regulatory changes to the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and other bedrock laws, in addition to plans to expand offshore oil and gas leasing along California’s coastline pose significant dangers for the Channel, as well as the communities that rely on a healthy ecosystem. Devastating federal budget and staffing cuts to core ocean and coastal science, conservation, and management programs will also have a huge impact.

Channelkeeper is working to push back against these dangerous advances while also protecting the sensitive waters, habitats, and rich biodiversity in our backyard.

In Washington and Sacramento, we are working with other Keeper organizations to call for strong environmental and public safeguards. We are also doubling down to defend ecosystems closer to home.

Sable Offshore, a Texas-based oil company, is aggressively working to resume offshore drilling and use of the corroded onshore pipelines that caused a massive oil spill at Refugio State Beach ten years ago. Despite state fines, agency orders, and public opposition, Sable has disregarded water quality and coastal protection laws and conducted unauthorized work along the coast, including in sensitive areas.

Channelkeeper is at the forefront of the fight against Sable. We have partnered with the Environmental Defense Center and other local groups to bring a legal challenge to the Office of State Fire Marshal’s decision to allow onshore pipelines to operate without anti-corrosion protection. We are mobilizing community members to join us at key public hearings and events to remind officials about what is at stake from another oil spill and urge them to oppose Sable’s project.

I’m proud that Channelkeeper is on the frontlines, fighting to protect the clean water, wildlife, and habitats that make the Santa Barbara Channel so special. With our community’s support, we are driving real change—defending our coast, holding polluters accountable, and conserving this incredible place for future generations. I hope you will join us and be part of the movement to keep our Channel healthy and vibrant.

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, community engagement, and enforcement.

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WATERSHED BRIGADE

Celebrating a Trash Removal Milestone



Channelkeeper's Watershed Brigade has officially removed over 50,000 pounds of trash since 2020 from local communities and waterways!

This powerful milestone reflects years of dedication from volunteers who have rolled up their sleeves to clean up neighborhoods, parks, creeks, and coastal areas. From plastic bottles, cigarette butts, and food wrappers to tires and abandoned debris, every item removed represents a step toward a cleaner ocean and healthier ecosystems.

The Watershed Brigade is a community engagement program that combines volunteer action, education, and advocacy. At each event, volunteers not only help clean up but also learn about the larger issues behind trash and marine debris, such as how pollution impacts wildlife, public health, and water quality.

"Reaching this milestone shows what's possible when

people come together with a shared sense of purpose," said program leader Veronica Moran. "We're not just cleaning up, we're building a culture of environmental stewardship."

What makes the Watershed Brigade unique is its emphasis on collective impact. Every cleanup is part of a broader movement to shift behaviors, raise awareness, and drive change that lasts well beyond the event itself.

As we look to the future, the Watershed Brigade is aiming even higher—with more cleanups, more education, and more people getting involved.

Ready to be part of the next 50,000 pounds? Whether you join a cleanup, help spread the word, or start your own local effort, your participation matters.

To join the Watershed Brigade, visit our webpage (sbck.org/brigade) or follow us on Instagram (@Watershedbrigade).



50,763 lbs.
of Trash Removed



2,067
Volunteers Engaged



955
Sites Cleaned

Cumulative statistics since May 2020.

ADVOCACY

Fighting Back Against Sable

Channelkeeper is standing strong with our community and environmental allies to protect our coast from the renewed threat of oil development. In April, we joined forces with the Environmental Defense Center, Sierra Club, Get Oil Out!, and the Santa Barbara County Action Network to file a lawsuit against the Office of the State Fire Marshal for its decision last December to grant waivers to Sable Offshore Corp. from onshore pipeline safety requirements.

Our lawsuit challenges the State Fire Marshal's decision to grant waivers to allow Sable to operate the onshore pipeline without effective protection against corrosion—the issue that caused a major oil spill a decade ago. Shockingly, these waivers were issued with no public engagement, no environmental review, and no written justification. These deficiencies are core elements of our legal challenge.

Meanwhile, Sable has continued to push forward aggressively, carrying out unpermitted work along the coast and ignoring agency directives to stop work until approvals are secured. The California Coastal Commission responded in April by issuing its third Cease and Desist Order, a restoration order, and a record \$18 million in penalties. Despite this, Sable kept working. The Central Coast Regional Water Board also held a hearing in April, during which its board members unanimously voted to refer Sable's water quality violations to the Attorney General for legal action.

May 19, 2025, marked the tenth anniversary of the Plains All-American Pipeline rupture at Refugio State Beach. To commemorate the day, more than 100 community members of all ages participated in a memorial paddle out at the Refugio State Beach spill site as a way to reflect together on the destruction and stand in opposition to offshore drilling.



Sable marked the date with an alarming and misleading announcement that it had resumed offshore drilling and was pumping 6,000 barrels of oil per day from offshore wells for storage at Las Flores Canyon Oil and Gas Plant.

Channelkeeper thanks the countless number of community members who stood with us at the recent public hearings, rallies, and informational sessions. Your voices are vital in convincing agency officials to hold Sable accountable and protect the California coast. Our work to protect the coast before public agencies and in the courts is not done. Together, we are standing up for our environment, our community, and our future.

MONITORING

In the Field with Water Quality Interns

On a foggy October morning, Aaron Garcia kneels in a thicket of cattails and dips a pH sensor into Lower Glen Annie Creek. He waits until the digital numbers on the screen stabilize and enters the information onto his datasheet. A couple of miles away, from a bridge overlooking the Goleta Slough, Maddy Hulle drops a bucket on a rope over the railing to collect a water sample.

Since Channelkeeper resumed its Goleta creek water quality monitoring program in July of 2024, these two Channelkeeper interns have endured blackberry brambles, slippery creek banks, and spider webs to conduct monthly water quality sampling at twenty different stream sites throughout the Goleta Valley watershed. They take in-stream measurements for dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity, turbidity, and temperature; collect water samples to be analyzed in the lab for nitrate and fecal indicator bacteria; and document observations including algae coverage, water flow, and the presence of trash, for each site they visit.

“Besides helping us identify and address pollution sources, monitoring the water quality in our local streams is important for understanding the broader health of watersheds throughout the Goleta Valley,” explains Hulle. “The information that we gain can reveal not only information about the water quality at one point in time, but it can also provide insight on what natural or unnatural factors may be causing these changes.”

The interns incorporate the data they collect into Channelkeeper’s long-term data set, which spans 20 years. This publicly available information allows Channelkeeper and others to conduct analyses and determine if and how the waterways are changing over time.



Channelkeeper also submits our creek data to the City of Goleta and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board to help understand the conditions of Goleta’s creeks and inform decisions about improving their health.

“I appreciate the opportunity to do my part to protect and advocate for local waterways,” Garcia says as he holds a water sample bottle up to the sunlight. “Our community has a right to healthy water, both now and for future generations.”

EDUCATION

Inspiring Youth from People's Self-Help Housing

“They’re juuumping!” a third-grade boy shouts as dolphins speed past the boat and leap into the air during a Seafari Cruise. The students rush to the starboard side, their eyes wide with wonder.

Channelkeeper’s on-the-water programs connect young people with their watershed and the Santa Barbara Channel and allow them to interact with it. Students can see wildlife that relies on clean water and trace the path that water takes through their community to the ocean. This brings awareness to the impacts of their everyday actions on water quality and the environment.

Since 2016, Channelkeeper’s education team has partnered with People’s Self-Help Housing, an affordable housing organization, to share experiences like Seafari Cruises and Shore and Sea kayaking adventures with young people, ages seven to fourteen.

On Seafari Cruises, students head out of the harbor aboard Channelkeeper’s boat, where they learn about the Channel’s marine and coastal ecosystems, help collect plankton samples, and experience being offshore.

“Our students are used to standing in the sand and looking out,” says People’s Self-Help Housing Jardin de las Rosas Regional Coordinator & Lead Educator Doreida Jimenez. “This experience gives them an opportunity to observe their home on the coast from a new perspective.”

“Channelkeeper’s on-the-water programs connect young people with their watershed and the Santa Barbara Channel and allow them to interact with it.”

This vantage point can have a powerful effect. By introducing young people to the wildlife and watershed science in their own backyard, Channelkeeper hopes to spark their interest in protecting the environment.

For many of the students, these on-the-water adventures represent the first time they have been on a boat. In fact, 45% of the participants this year had never been on a boat



before. While some are hesitant when they first come aboard, their eyes light up with excitement as soon as the sea spray hits their faces, and wildlife like seals, sea lions, and dolphins emerge nearby.

“As a result of this exposure to wildlife, I think that students feel more connected to these creatures and, when they have the opportunity later in life, will do more to protect them,” says Jimenez.

For Channelkeeper’s Shore and Sea program, students learn about watershed science in the classroom and then experience the land-sea interface during an outdoor kayaking adventure in the Santa Barbara Harbor. In addition to partnering with schools, over the summer Channelkeeper is thrilled to offer this opportunity to summer program partners, including the high school students from People’s Self-Help Housing.

“The kayaking adventure has become a program highlight,” says Jimenez. “This year, as soon as we got back to shore and stepped out of the kayaks, a student asked, ‘Do we get to do that again next year?’ That’s a big win.”

IN MEMORIAM

Honoring the Life of Jack Stapelmann



It is with profound love, appreciation, and gratitude that we honor the life and legacy of Jack Stapelmann. Throughout his lifetime, Jack's adventurous spirit found freedom and pure enjoyment out on the water. As an accomplished sailor, boat builder, surfer, and diver, Jack was passionate about the ocean and protecting the Santa Barbara Channel.

His experiences as a waterman informed his environmental advocacy. He felt the effects of pollution and observed imperiled ecosystems first-hand. In 2001, as Channelkeeper was establishing its organizational incorporation, Jack joined the board and for more than two decades, he helped chart the organization's course as an enduring supporter.

Jack's enthusiasm for the ocean and Channelkeeper's mission was infectious, and he inspired hundreds of supporters to get involved. When Jack spoke, you believed; and he knew how to tell Channelkeeper's story to spark action. He often invited community members out on his beloved boat, Enchantress, so that they could feel the salt spray, connect with the ocean, and experience the vibrant coastal ecosystems that Channelkeeper works to safeguard.

Over the years, Jack and his wife Judy also brought people together to support the organization by opening their home for special events, hosting lunches at the Santa Barbara Yacht Club, and sponsoring volunteer appreciation gatherings. He was also the driving force behind beautiful community events such as the annual Student Art Show, which has inspired young artists for 22 years.

"Jack was very committed to community engagement and believed passionately in Channelkeeper's work to protect the SB Channel and its watersheds," says longtime friend and Channelkeeper board member Sherry Madsen. "Today the organization's strength is part of his legacy."

"Channelkeeper will deeply miss Jack," says executive director Ted Morton. "We are thankful that he helped to build a solid foundation for the organization that will propel us forward and help us continue to accomplish positive results."

We are grateful beyond words for the shared vision for clean water, healthy habitats, abundant wildlife, and thriving communities that Jack upheld along with us. Today, his efforts to protect the waters along our coast are visible in every translucent ripple and wave.

Donations Made in Memory of Jack Stapelmann



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BLUE WATER BALL

Community Support for Clean Water

More than 200 community members came together on March 29th for the 23rd Blue Water Ball, a vibrant evening celebrating Channelkeeper's efforts to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds.

Art Cisneros and Mia Lopez opened the event with a moving Chumash blessing. Guests were treated to a stunning visual journey beneath the waves, courtesy of acclaimed underwater filmmakers Howard and Michele Hall, whose work inspires awareness and appreciation for marine ecosystems.

"Our efforts to protect the Channel's waters and wildlife are more urgent than ever," said Channelkeeper Executive Director Ted Morton. "Events like the Blue Water Ball are powerful reminders of what's possible when a community unites around a shared vision."

The evening raised more than \$170,000 to support Channelkeeper's initiatives, with a generous \$30,000 match from the John C. Mithun Foundation for the evening's paddle raise. This year's Blue Water Ball was more than a fundraiser—it was a celebration of our shared commitment to clean water and a healthy coast.



Nell Campbell (4)

Many Thanks to Our Blue Water Ball Supporters

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October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024



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KEEPING WATCH FOR CLEAN WATER

2025 STUDENT ART SHOW



Channelkeeper's Student Art Show has celebrated young people's connection to the ocean for 22 years. This spring, students showcased their creative visions of the Santa Barbara Channel through vibrant and inspiring art. On May 1st, Channelkeeper hosted a community reception at Jodi House Gallery to honor the talented students selected for the show and appreciate their beautiful artwork.

Special thanks to juror Solange Aguilar and show sponsors Trillium Enterprise, Inc. and the City of Goleta.

