



## **Developments in the Push to Restart Oil Production Along the Gaviota Coast**

There have been many developments in recent weeks related to Sable Offshore's plans to restart offshore oil production off the sensitive Gaviota Coast. We thought it might help recap the cadence of these actions by providing a brief timeline of this activity. However, please keep in mind that capturing the current status of the legal, advocacy, and public education efforts is challenging, due to the ever-evolving nature of this issue.

- On December 16, the County Board of Supervisors voted 3 to 1 to deny the transfer of key operational permits from ExxonMobil to Sable. Channelkeeper provided testimony at the hearing, urging the Supervisors to deny the transfer. We pointed out that Sable's record, which includes numerous lawsuits and ignored notices of violations and cease and desist orders, makes clear it doesn't have the leadership skills or financial resources to operate the risky oil facilities in compliance with required permits and respond to an oil spill. We were pleased that the majority of the Board shared our concerns.
- Subsequently, starting on December 17, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) initiated a series of politicized and hasty steps on the matter. On December 17, PHMSA weighed in to reclassify the pipelines running from the Gaviota Coast to Kern County from intrastate to interstate.

- On December 22, PHMSA decided that Sable could restart production through the pipeline system, ignoring an October decision from the California Office of State Fire Marshall that more repairs were needed to satisfy pipeline safety requirements.
- One day later, on December 23, PHMSA approved an emergency special permit that would evade public notice and environmental review obligations under U.S. laws. The effect of the federal actions is to circumvent the oversight of state agencies, engagement of local elected officials, and viewpoints of community members who have consistently shown up at public meetings to overwhelmingly share their concerns about and opposition to restarting the onshore pipeline system that was responsible for the massive 2015 spill at Refugio Beach State Park, and that by its design is highly susceptible to corrosion.
- On December 24, with Environmental Defense Center (EDC) representing us, Channelkeeper quickly joined EDC, Get Oil Out!, Santa Barbara County Action Network, Sierra Club, and two other organizations to challenge PHMSA's decision in federal court. We are claiming PHMSA violated the Pipeline Safety Act and National Environmental Policy Act.

As we start the new year, Channelkeeper is emboldened to continue fighting to protect the Gaviota Coast and Santa Barbara Channel from expanded offshore oil drilling through this defective pipeline system.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to the EDC team, who spent time away from family and friends during the holidays, to prepare the latest, imperative legal challenge on this matter. We are also grateful to our supporters and colleagues throughout the community who remain committed to this critical issue.



## Your Voice Needed: Oppose the New U.S. Offshore Drilling Plan by January 23

The U.S. Department of the Interior released a sweeping new offshore drilling proposal in November that threatens some of North America's most treasured coastal and marine ecosystems. Known as the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program, the plan would open the door to thirty-four potential offshore lease sales across 1.27 billion acres of ocean waters.

It proposes six new oil and gas lease sales off the California coast—including the Santa Barbara Channel—in addition to twenty-one new lease sales in Alaska and seven lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico. The six leases in federal waters off California's Coast would be the first new lease sales since 1984.

Channelkeeper opposes the plan to open up the California coast to new offshore oil and gas development offshore. As we know through experience, offshore drilling can lead to significant oil spills, which are catastrophic to the sensitive and biological rich Santa Barbara Channel, as well as the robust tourism and fisheries industries that are supported by these important coastal waters.

The release of the new offshore drilling plan opened a 60-day public comment window, which will close on January 23, 2026. Channelkeeper will submit a public comment opposing this draft leasing program, and the public has an opportunity to do the same. Public comments must be submitted by January 23 through the Federal Register. Click here for [talking points](#) to consider as you draft your comments.

[Submit Comments](#)

---

# Santa Barbara People's Hearing

Protect the California  
Coast from New Offshore  
Oil & Gas Drilling



Learn More  
+ RSVP

Friday 1/16, 4:30 - 6:30 pm  
CEC Environmental Hub at 1219 State St.



environmental  
DEFENSE CENTER



Environmental  
Affairs Board  
CEC Associated Business



SURFRIDER  
FOUNDATION  
SANTA BARBARA



Santa Barbara  
CHANNELKEEPER®



SIERRA  
CLUB



SIERRA  
CLUB

**Santa Barbara People's Hearing**  
**Friday, January 16**  
**4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.**  
**CEC Environmental Hub**

People's Hearings are taking place throughout the state this month in response to the Department of Interior proposal for new offshore oil and gas leasing off California in the next federal offshore drilling plan. Santa Barbara's People's Hearing will take place, on January 16, at 4:30 p.m. at the CEC Environmental Hub, 1219 State Street.

The event will feature educational presentations from ocean advocates, comments from community leaders and businesses, as well as opportunities for public participation and action related to the federal five-year lease plan comment period mentioned in the previous article. There will also be free pizza, drinks, and entertainment.

[RSVP](#)



## Channelkeeper's Legacy of Protection and Positive Impact

In 2026, Channelkeeper is proud to celebrate 25 years of protecting and restoring the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds. Since achieving official nonprofit status in 2001, Channelkeeper has grown into a leading force for clean water, healthy habitats, and a resilient coast, powered by science, advocacy, and community members that care deeply about this extraordinary place.

Over the past quarter century, Channelkeeper has worked on the front lines of environmental protection through water quality monitoring, legal advocacy, education programs, and partnerships that safeguard our coast for wildlife and people alike. From cleaner creeks and safer beaches to inspired students and empowered community members, the impacts of this work ripple far beyond the shoreline.

Throughout the year, we'll be honoring the achievements, partnerships, and people who have shaped Channelkeeper's journey — and looking ahead to the next 25 years of stewardship, innovation, and hope for the Santa Barbara Channel.

Thank you for being part of this legacy. Together, we'll continue to protect the place we all call home.

[Read Blog Post](#)



### California's New Bag Ban Takes Effect

January 1, 2026, marks a major milestone in California's ongoing effort to reduce plastic pollution. A strengthened statewide bag ban has officially gone into effect, closing a loophole in current law and eliminating most plastic bags at retail checkout statewide.

Although California first restricted single-use plastic bags in 2014, thicker "reusable" plastic bags continued to be sold in stores and ended up discarded as often as traditional bags, contributing to plastic pollution. The updated 2026 bag policy finally closes that loophole and significantly reduces the amount of plastic entering the environment.

Read our blog post to learn more about this important policy change and what it means for our coast and communities.

[Read Blog Post](#)



# Underwater Parks Day

**Saturday, January 17**

**10:00 am to 3:00 pm**

**Sea Center, 211 Stearns Wharf**

## **Underwater Parks Day Saturday, January 17**

Celebrate Underwater Parks Day with free admission to the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History's Sea Center on Stearns Wharf from 10:00 am to 3:00 p.m. on January 17, thanks to support from The Moeller Lab at UC Santa Barbara. Enjoy the Sea Center's interactive exhibits, ocean-themed crafts, face painting, and two storytime sessions in English and Spanish at 10:30 AM and 1:30 PM.

Underwater Parks Day celebrates Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), or underwater parks, that preserve the biodiversity and abundance of ocean life in our coastal waters. Some of the most nutrient-rich waters on the planet are located in the Santa Barbara Channel. These waters support abundant marine life found in kelp forests, tide pools, and rocky intertidal reef habitats. Channelkeeper will be there to share information about the Santa Barbara Channel, Marine Protected Areas, and marine ecosystems.

---



**MPA Watch Volunteer Training**  
**Tuesday, January 20**  
**5:30 to 6:30 p.m.**

Are you interested in becoming an MPA Watch volunteer? Sign up for Channelkeeper's Virtual Training on January 20th from 5:30 to 6:30 pm.

Channelkeeper's MPA Watch program conducts surveys of human use activities in our local marine protected areas (MPAs) at Campus Point MPA (IV/Goleta), Naples MPA, and Kashtayit MPA (Gaviota State Beach). The data collected helps to inform MPA monitoring and enforcement efforts. Surveys involve walking a designated transect along the beach at the MPAs mentioned above and recording all human use activities observed on the beach or just offshore. Volunteers are asked to conduct three surveys per month and surveys are conducted independently.

The volunteer training workshop will take place virtually and will be followed on a later date by a one-hour field training session at Campus Point in the Campus Point MPA. Click below to sign up for the volunteer training workshop.

[Sign Up](#)



## **Channelkeeper Board Walk**

### **Explore Rattlesnake Canyon**

Saturday, January 24

2:00 p.m.

**Channelkeeper January Board Walk**  
**Explore Rattlesnake Canyon with Karen Telleen-Lawton**  
**Saturday, January 24**  
**2:00 p.m.**

Ever wonder what Santa Barbara's front country looks like in the middle of a wet rain year? Can you imagine what it smells like, sounds like, and feels like? Join our next Channelkeeper Board Walk in Rattlesnake Canyon on Saturday, January 24.

Channelkeeper Board Walks are occasional walks and talks around town to explore water from different perspectives. They are designed for the whole community to understand our place in nature, especially with respect to life-giving water. Each is led by a Channelkeeper board member, drawing upon their expertise as naturalists, hydrologists, nature film producers, native plant gardeners, and more.

On January 24 we will gather at the trailhead on Las Canoas Road at 2:00. If it is still muddy, we will meet across the street in Skofield Park. Join us to learn about creek habitats and how Rattlesnake Creek factors into the archeology, history, geology, and biology of Santa Barbara. This short hike will be led by board member Karen Telleen-Lawton, author of *Canyon Voices – the Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon*.

Participants should wear sturdy shoes and bring a hat, jacket, water, and sunscreen.

---

# Watershed Brigade East Beach Cleanup



**January 31**

9:00 am to 11:00 am

East Beach @ Sycamore Creek Outlet

**East Beach Cleanup  
Saturday, January 31  
9 a.m. to 11 a.m.**

In January, the Watershed Brigade will clean up East Beach at the Sycamore Creek outlet. The Sycamore Creek Watershed covers 2,600 acres where nine miles of creeks run from the mountains through neighborhoods and out to the ocean. Litter from streets can enter these creeks and get washed out onto the beach during large rain events. We hope you can join us in removing this trash! Volunteers will meet on the beach near the Kids' Playground.

[Sign Up](#)

## Meet the Team

### Penny Owens

Education and Outreach  
Director



### Get to Know Penny Owens!

We're excited to debut a new interview series highlighting the dedicated people behind Santa Barbara Channelkeeper. From science and advocacy to education and community engagement, our team works every day to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel, and this series offers a chance to get to know them beyond their job titles.

In each interview, we'll spotlight a team member's role, what inspires their work, and what makes the Channel such a special place for them.

### **We're kicking things off by featuring the incredibly talented Penny Owens!**

Read on to meet the rock star education and outreach director helping drive our mission forward.

### ***Penny, tell us about your role and your favorite part of your job!***

As the education and community outreach director, I coordinate Channelkeeper's youth education programs and community outreach efforts although our whole team is part of the community outreach effort. My favorite part of my job is working with youth to share the beauty and wonders of our creeks and ocean in hopes that as adults they will also want to care for and protect them.

### ***How long have you been with Channelkeeper and how did your career path bring you to the organization?***

Five million years! I joined Channelkeeper part-time at first to coordinate education programs and assist with dive surveys and restoration projects. I have had the privilege of working for Channelkeeper full-time for almost 20 years.

I was first introduced to Channelkeeper's important work over burritos after a day of diving in the kelp forests along the Santa Barbara coastline. At the time, I was

working as a research diver. We had a dive site in Santa Barbara at Naples Reef and were assisted by Channelkeeper's Science Director Jessie Altstatt. Jessie met us at Naples and helped with surveys and then our dive team helped out with her project by doing kelp forest surveys at Mohawk Reef (Mesa Lane).

Over dinner later that day, Jessie was sharing stories about Channelkeeper's work standing up to big polluters and fighting for clean water in one of the organization's first cases – Halaco – where a metal recycling facility was polluting coastal wetlands and communities in Oxnard and Port Hueneme. It was very inspiring to hear about the work to collect samples and data documenting the pollution and how a small organization stood up to a big polluter.

***What project/initiative have you worked on that you're most proud of?***

If I helped to inspire any student to care for and protect our water – creeks, rivers, beaches, ocean that is my proudest accomplishment!

***What's something that we might be surprised to learn about you?***

In my time at Channelkeeper aboard our research vessels, I have been lucky enough to have observed at least ten different kinds of cetaceans, but am still waiting to see ORCAS!

***If you were a marine animal, which one would you be and why?***

I really love nudibranchs! There are so many kinds and colors, from a gorgeous green species only found on eelgrass to the classic bright purple and orange of the Spanish Shawl and many more. Some even repurpose other organisms' stinging cells for protection after eating them!

***Thank you, Penny for your dedication and the wonderful inspiration that you share throughout our community!***

---



### Support Clean Water

Want to make a difference for the environment and your community? Making a tax-deductible contribution to Santa Barbara Channelkeeper today is an investment in clean beaches, healthy watersheds, and a more sustainable future.

Thank you for your support!

[Donate](#)

**Celebrating 25 Years of Impact**  
Clean Water, Healthy Habitats, Thriving Communities



CONNECT WITH US



Santa Barbara Channelkeeper | 714 Bond Avenue | Santa Barbara, CA 93103 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)