

December eNewsletter



New Five-Year Offshore Drilling Plan Includes California Waters

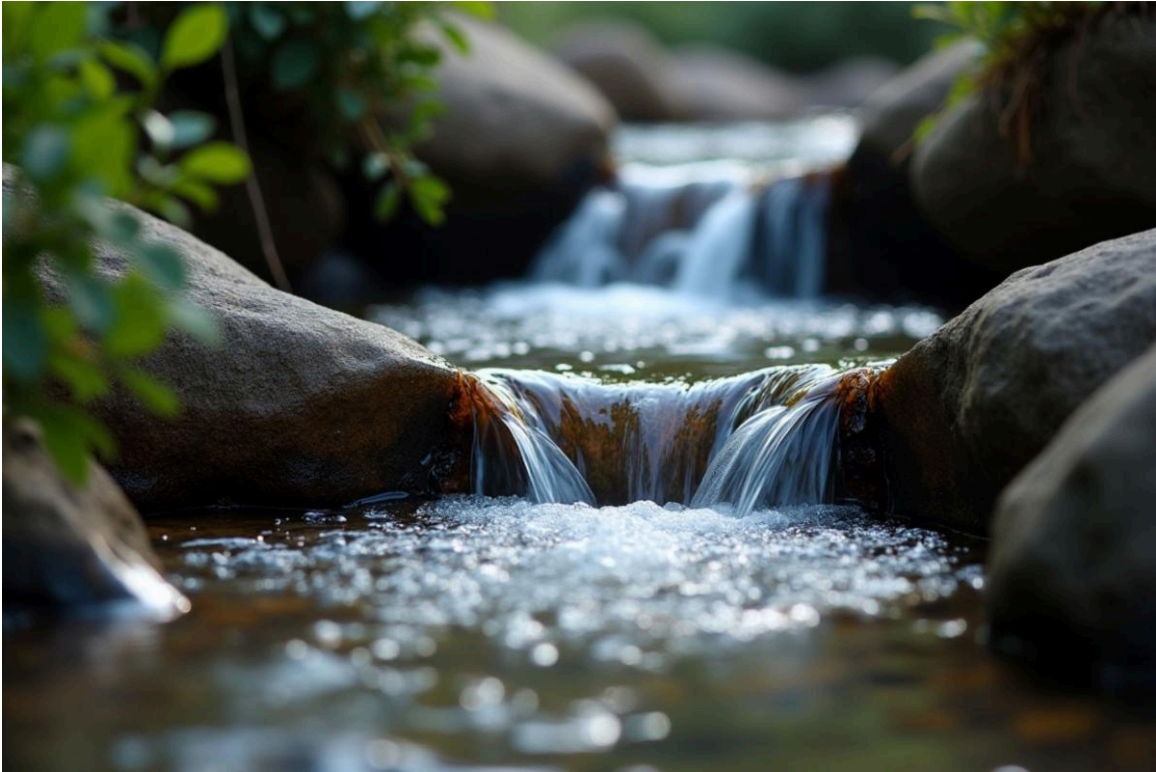
The U.S. Department of the Interior released a Five-Year Offshore Drilling Plan on November 20. The plan proposes six new oil and gas lease sales off the California coast—including the Santa Barbara Channel—in addition to twenty-one new lease sales in Alaska and seven lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico. 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. Because the Department of the Interior will **not** be holding public hearings on this significant proposal, organizations are coming together to host People's Hearings during the public comment window to allow the community to learn about the proposal, hear from community leaders, and show support for protecting California's coast from new offshore oil and gas development. Santa Barbara's People's Hearing is in development and currently slated for mid-January, 2026. Be on the lookout for

more information as soon as details are finalized. Click here for [talking points](#) to consider as you draft your comments.

Submit Comments



Proposed Definition of “Waters of the United States” Threatens Water Protections

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced a proposed rule on November 17 that would significantly narrow the definition of “Waters of the United States” (WOTUS), the cornerstone of federal Clean Water Act protections.

By redefining which waters qualify for federal protection, the draft rule removes longstanding safeguards from many rivers, streams, wetlands, lakes, and other critical waterways. If adopted, countless waters that communities, wildlife, and ecosystems depend on would be left vulnerable to unchecked pollution and destructive development. For Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, this could mean greater risks to clean drinking water, degraded habitat for fish and wildlife, and increased contamination flowing into the Pacific Ocean.

The Clean Water Act has already suffered significant setbacks following the Supreme Court’s 2023 decision in *Sackett v. EPA*, which sharply curtailed protections for wetlands and other waters across the United States. Instead of working to restore lost safeguards, the newly proposed WOTUS definition would deepen those rollbacks, further limiting federal authority to prevent pollution before it reaches rivers, aquifers, and coastal waters.

This proposal also comes amid a broader pattern of proposed environmental rollbacks by the EPA. Earlier this year, the agency initiated efforts to revise wastewater standards for coal-burning power plants and reconsider Mercury and

Air Toxics Standards, among other plans. The EPA has also announced plans to weaken limits on PFAS, dangerous “forever chemicals,” in drinking water and has shuttered key EPA offices responsible for addressing disproportionate pollution impacts in low-income, rural, and frontline communities.

Together, these actions threaten to reverse more than half a century of progress toward cleaner water and healthier communities. Clean Water Act protections have been essential in reducing dangerous pollutants, restoring damaged waterways, safeguarding wetlands, and ensuring that industries cannot use rivers and streams as dumping grounds.

Channelkeeper will be submitting detailed comments and urging EPA to restore, not dismantle, our nation’s clean water protections. We will recommend that EPA not finalize their proposed changes to the definition of WOTUS. Community members are invited to provide comments before January 5, 2026. Click below to provide comments.

[Submit Comments](#)



Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors Will Reconvene to Consider Findings for Denial of Sable Permit Transfer

On December 16, the County Board of Supervisors will meet on the issue of transferring the operating permits of the Santa Ynez Unit, which includes the pipeline that ruptured and caused the 2015 spill at Refugio Beach.

This hearing is being held to complete action the Board of Supervisors initiated on November 4, when it last met on this issue. At that meeting, four of the five Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors determined that due to Sable’s extensive list of violations that the company has racked up as well as questions of

financial capacity, they could not make the finding that the company has the training, skills, and resources to operate the facilities in question.

Santa Barbara County staff had previously recommended approval in its staff report, despite the lengthy list of violations including twenty-one criminal charges brought by the Santa Barbara County District Attorney, a lawsuit from the state Attorney General, and a historic \$18 million fine from the state Coastal Commission. In November, the Board of Supervisors voted to continue the hearing to allow Santa Barbara County staff to prepare findings to support denial of Sable's application.

On December 16, there will be a full hearing to consider the findings for denial of Sable's application to transfer the permits from Exxon. It will be as important as it was in November to turnout in support of the County's Board of Supervisors denying the permit transfer. So, one more time, we are asking the community to wear red and come out in support of our coast!

Written public comments one page or less can be submitted via email by 5pm on Monday, December 15. Once the agenda for the meeting is finalized, we will share more details about the opportunities for public comment.



Settlement Agreement for 2024 Goleta Sewage Spill Under Review

In mid-October, the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) and Goleta West Sanitary District (Goleta West) released a proposed settlement agreement related to a substantial sewage spill that occurred almost two years ago. Channelkeeper has several concerns about the agreement's details, including how the penalty amount was determined.

In February 2024, over one million gallons of untreated sewage spewed from a corroded 24-inch force main owned and operated by the Goleta West Sanitary District. The sewage spill occurred over the course of fourteen hours before it was identified and stopped by District staff. The untreated wastewater discharged

to an unnamed tributary to Tecolotito Creek, the Goleta Slough State Marine Conservation Area, and its estuary, and the Pacific Ocean.

Notice of the spill took several days to reach appropriate public health and conservation staff of the county and state. Estimates of the size of the spill substantially increased, a few times, from 1000 gallons to one million gallons over the course of six days. The early underestimation of the spill volume, combined with a breakdown in communication between agencies led to a five-day delay in closing beaches and notifying the public about contaminated coastal waters.

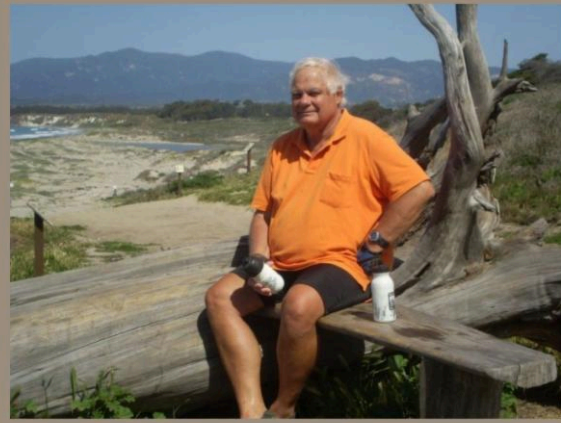
Nearby beaches were closed for twenty-two days due to the spill, which was one hundred times larger than any other sewage spill into Santa Barbara waters since 2013.

In 2024, the Regional Water Quality Control Board initiated an enforcement action against Goleta West for violations of water quality laws. Last year, Channelkeeper staff testified at a Regional Board meeting to encourage the staff to conduct a thorough spill investigation and administer adequate penalties to ensure accountability.

In October 2025, the Regional Board staff presented a proposed settlement agreement for the violation. The proposal calls for an administrative civil liability of a little more than \$1.5 million, which will be used to support a four-year supplemental environmental project to monitor domestic wells and small drinking water systems and address contamination throughout Santa Barbara County.

After reviewing the proposed settlement agreement, we submitted a letter to the Board expressing our concerns with the staff's application of a high volume "discount" in determining the fine. Our hope was that the Board staff would also provide clearer details about what happened before, during, and immediately after the spill to help community members understand the changes that are needed to prevent future sewage spills and delayed public notification actions.

The Regional Board staff is currently reviewing the comments it received on the proposed settlement agreement and may consider the proposal to the Regional Board members for adoption in February 2026. Channelkeeper staff will attend and share our concerns at this meeting.



Al Leydecker
1941 - 2025

In Memory of Al Leydecker, Beloved Channelkeeper Supporter and Stream Team Scientific Advisor

We are heartbroken by the passing of Al Leydecker on November 2. We are deeply grateful for the many years of service and guidance that he provided to Channelkeeper's water quality monitoring programs, including valuable research, data analysis, and in-depth reports.

Al Leydecker began his work with Channelkeeper in the fall of 2000, both as a volunteer and as a scientific advisor for our water quality monitoring program. He was actively engaged in research on the Ventura River and Goleta streams for over fifteen years and authored many reports and essays. Al was also a key team member of Channelkeeper's sampling team that conducted water quality monitoring looking at dissolved oxygen levels in the pre-dawn hours to better understand the impacts of excessive algae and nutrients in the Ventura River.

Our staff and many dedicated community volunteers alike benefited greatly from his extensive knowledge. Al was always quick to share entertaining stories about his many adventures in life from rafting rivers all over the country for both pleasure and work, to back country skiing into the Sierra Nevada mountains to measure snow levels for water supply surveys, and even a short stint in an elected office.

Channelkeeper is indebted to Al for his years of service and guidance, and he will be greatly missed. To explore some of the essays and reports he worked on in association with Channelkeeper, click [here](#).



New Date!
Maria Ygnacio Creek Cleanup
Collaboration with EDC
Saturday, December 6
9 am - 11:30 am

Maria Ignacio Creek Cleanup
Saturday, December 6
9:00 am to 11:30 am

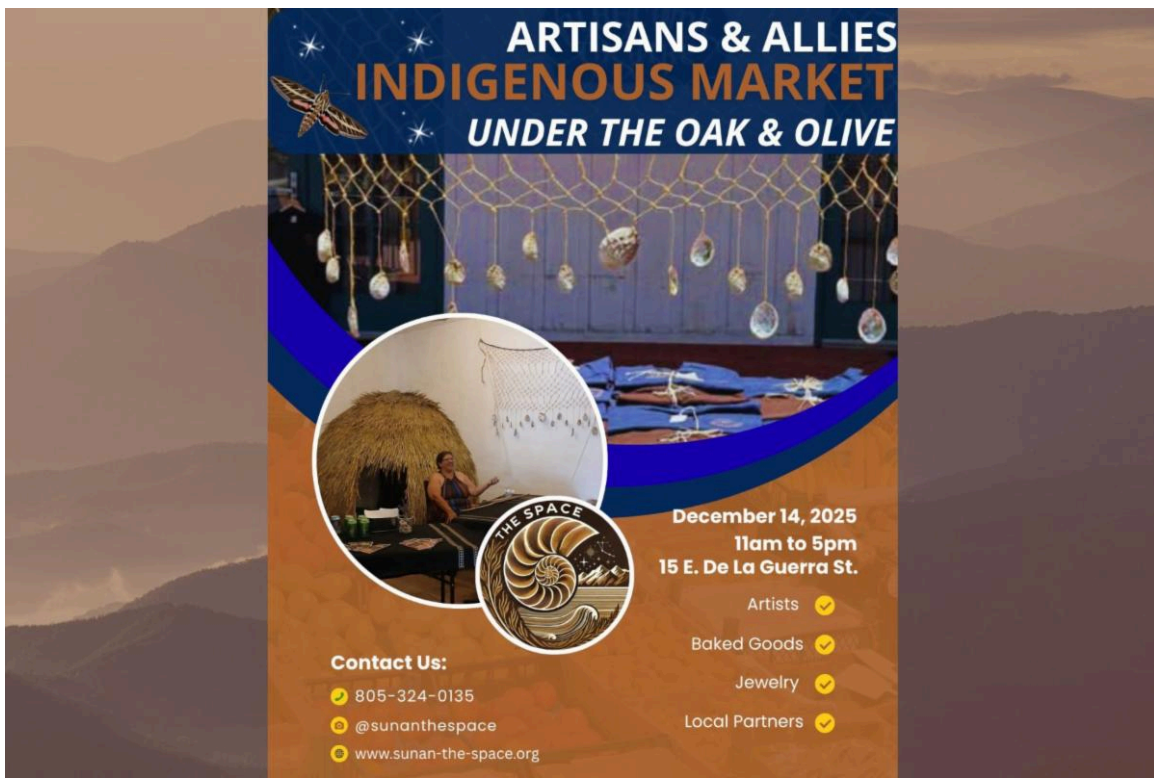
Join us for the Maria Ygnacio Creek Cleanup! This weekend, Channelkeeper is teaming up with the Environmental Defense Center for a community cleanup at Maria Ygnacio Creek.

Volunteers will meet at the corner of Ribera Drive and Matorral Way. We will work to remove litter and debris from the creek bed to help protect local wildlife and waterways. The terrain can be rocky and wet, so please wear sturdy shoes and clothes you don't mind getting dirty.

Channelkeeper will provide buckets, trash grabbers, and gloves. Just bring your energy and community spirit. You may also want to consider bringing a hat, sunscreen, and reusable water bottle.

Let's work together to keep our creeks and coast clean. We hope to see you there!

[Sign Up](#)



**Under the Oak and Olive Artisans & Allies Indigenous Market
Sunday, December 14
14 E. De La Guerra Street**

Celebrate art, culture, and the season at the Artists & Allies Indigenous Market, hosted by The SPACE on Sunday, December 14, from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm. This free, seasonal market will take place under the oak and olive trees in the Casa de la Guerra courtyard at 14 E. De La Guerra Street. There will be activities for young people, community-building opportunities, baked goods, and beautiful items to purchase. Support local creators and explore diverse, culturally rich textiles, jewelry, art, and more from talented Indigenous artists as well as information shared by local groups and organizers.

Channelkeeper will be present to share our work to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds. Our team is honored to support The SPACE's ongoing efforts to promote cultural heritage, provide creative resources and connections for Indigenous communities, and offer a warm, welcoming place to be.

For more information, please contact [The SPACE](#).



Join the Solstice Sea Star Search this December

Each year, researchers from the California Academy of Sciences ask the public for help identifying sea stars along the California coast. This is a great opportunity to explore tidepools and contribute to an important community science initiative.

This year, the search takes place during the entire month of December. Researchers are documenting all sea stars but are especially interested in finding sunflower sea stars (*Pycnopodia helianthoides*) and giant pink sea stars (*Pisaster brevispinus*) living along the California coast. Sunflower stars are important keystone predators in kelp forests along our coast and have been especially hard-hit by sea star wasting syndrome. While we know there are some sunflower star populations still out there, they're pretty hard to find.

More people searching for sea stars means more chances of finding and documenting them — we're hopeful that by coming together to search for these keystone species, we can better understand and restore sea star populations in the long run.

Here's how to participate:

- Visit tidepools during the low tide in December.
 - Download the iNaturalist app and document any sea stars that you see.
 - If you spot a sunflower star or giant pink sea star, send the iNaturalist observation link to: solsticeseastarsearch@gmail.com.
 - Spread the word with hashtag #SolsticeSeaStarSearch!
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California King Tides Project

December 4, 5, & 6, 2025

January 2, 3, 2026

Community Science Opportunity: Help Document King Tides this Winter

The term King Tide describes an especially high winter tide when the sun and the moon are at their closest to the Earth. Each winter, high tide events provide us with a great opportunity to understand how sea level rise will impact California's 1,100 miles of coastline. On November 6, our beaches experienced extreme high and low tides. King Tides return on December 4, 5, and 6 and again on January 2 and 3, 2026.

You can take part in an exciting community science initiative by taking photos of beaches at high tide during King Tide events and share them with the [California King Tides Project](#), an initiative led by the California Coastal Commission.

The California King Tides Project engages the public to help visualize future sea levels by observing the high tides of today and how those tides interact with our coastal infrastructure, recreation areas, and ecosystems. Photos and observations by community scientists help document current flood risk in coastal areas, envision the impacts of future sea level rise in a community, validate climate change models by comparing predictions with the high tide reality, and serve as a living record of change for future generations.

Head to the beach on any of these dates to document the first of this winter's King Tides. The highest tides will take place during the morning hours:

- Dec. 4, 2025 – high tide 7:58 AM / 7.18 ft
 - Dec. 5, 2025 – high tide 8:43 AM / 7.23 ft.
 - Dec. 6, 2025 – high tide 9:29 AM / 7.04 ft.
 - Jan. 2, 2026 – high tide 7:49 AM / 7.03 ft.
 - Jan. 3, 2026 – high tide 8:37 AM / 7.02 ft.
 - Jan. 4, 2026 – high tide 9:24 AM / 6.79 ft.
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BLUE WATER BALL

Celebrating 25 Years - Clean Water, Healthy Habitats, and Thriving Communities



Save the Date for the Blue Water Ball 2026
Saturday, March 14, 2026
5 pm - 9 pm

Channelkeeper is pleased to present Blue Water Ball 2026 on Saturday, March 14 at the seaside Cabrillo Pavilion. The Blue Water Ball raises critical funds that support our programs and make it possible for us to achieve our mission. This year's event will celebrate 25 years of Channelkeeper's work for clean water, healthy habitats, and thriving communities.

This annual fundraiser and premier social gathering will bring together ocean enthusiasts and activists, civic leaders, business owners, and public officials for a lively and memorable evening. The event will be emceed by Santa Barbara luminary Geoff Green and include a welcome from Chumash leader Mia Lopez. We'll also have a multicourse dinner, wines and brews, live music, and exciting auctions for art, gear, outdoor adventures, and more. We will announce news about our inspirational keynote speaker soon.

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Saturday, March 14, 2026
5 PM - 9 PM
Cabrillo Pavilion
1118 E. Cabrillo Blvd., Santa Barbara

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Tickets will go on sale January 2026

For more information about the event, as well as sponsorship opportunities, please visit: www.bluewaterball.org.



Channelkeeper Featured in Brie Garcia Interview

Executive Director Ted Morton recently sat down for a thoughtful and energetic conversation with media personality Brie Garcia, for her YouTube channel, delivering a compelling message about the health of our local waters and the challenges facing the Santa Barbara Channel. The discussion touches on pollution and climate change and impacts on marine ecosystems, while emphasizing that collective action can make a real difference for ocean health and encouraging viewers to stay informed, support environmental efforts, and help spread awareness.

[Watch Video](#)



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](#)

KEEPING WATCH FOR CLEAN WATER
SINCE 1999



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