



Santa Barbara
CHANNELKEEPER®

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2026



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On the cover: A volunteer removes trash at West Beach during Coastal Cleanup Day 2025. Photo Credit: Matt Dayka.



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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

Standing Together to Protect Our Coast

Dear Channelkeeper Family,

I am reminded of just how powerful community action can be when we come together to protect the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds. While environmental protections across the country continue to face serious pressure, our region has shown what's possible when people stand up for clean water, healthy ecosystems, and community well-being. In this moment, our shared commitment to the Channel has never been more meaningful or more impactful.

That commitment came into clear focus in November and December, when community voices helped achieve an important outcome. On November 4, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to effectively deny the transfer of owner, operator, and guarantor permits from ExxonMobil to Sable Offshore Corporation. The Supervisors took official action to deny the transfer on December 16.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration overrode public sentiment and State authority in March, when it issued an order under the Defense Production Act, authorizing Sable to restart offshore oil development off Gaviota Coast using the onshore pipeline system responsible for a devastating 2015 oil spill. The State is challenging this unprecedented action in court. Disappointed but undeterred, community members gathered on March 19 to stand together in opposition and send a clear message: we will not give up.

The inspiring public turnout in recent months represents a clear affirmation of our community's determination to safeguard the ecologically rich and economically vital coast.

As we build on the determination of residents who speak from their hearts and experience, Channelkeeper's commitment to environmental stewardship remains strong and forward-looking. This year, Channelkeeper is celebrating 25 years of conservation leadership and achievements. We continue our work to reduce pollution, monitor waterways, protect aquatic habitats, and educate local students about their connections to the environment. Beyond Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, we are working alongside allied organizations across California and the nation to defend clean water protections and advance smart, science-based policies that support a healthier, more resilient future.

The Santa Barbara Channel is one of the most biologically diverse and treasured marine regions on the planet. Its streams, creeks, beaches, ocean waters, and islands shape the identity and vitality of our community. Together, we have shown that when we speak up and work together, we can protect what we love. With continued collaboration and resolve, we will keep moving forward for clean water, for our coast, and for generations to come.

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.

714 Bond Avenue
Santa Barbara, CA 93103
tel 805.563.3377
info@sbck.org sbck.org



25 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Celebrating Channelkeeper's Legacy of Environmental Protection

We are proud to kick off a year-long celebration marking Santa Barbara Channelkeeper's 25th anniversary as an independent conservation organization. For a quarter century, Channelkeeper has combined science-based advocacy, education, fieldwork, community engagement, and enforcement to protect the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds—one of the most biodiverse marine regions on the planet.

Channelkeeper became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2001, at a time when Santa Barbara County had more public health warnings for poor water quality than any other coastal county in California. Since then, we have grown from a small group of dedicated community members into a leading voice for clean water and coastal protection along California's Central Coast.

Through on-the-water monitoring, educational programs, policy development, and community partnerships, Channelkeeper has played a pivotal role in improving water quality and coastal health from Point Conception to the Ventura River, and from the ridges of the Santa Ynez Mountains to the northern Channel Islands.

"For 25 years, Channelkeeper has served as a vigilant defender of our coast," said Executive Director Ted Morton. "The commitment of our staff, volunteers, supporters, partners, and community members who believe in the importance of a healthy and resilient ocean and coast and our leadership has resulted in significant achievements for clean water and the environment."

Channelkeeper's impact has been and continues to be extensive. Our team conducts scientific monitoring of creeks, beaches, and marine habitats to safeguard public health and inform environmental policy. We secured a landmark agreement with the City of Santa Barbara that reduced sewage spills by 91 percent and led to the repair or replacement of 34 miles of aging sewer infrastructure, dramatically decreasing the number of beach closures and public health advisories.



Through on-the-water monitoring, educational programs, policy development, and community partnerships, Channelkeeper has played a pivotal role in improving water quality and coastal health.

Channelkeeper has also reached more than 43,400 young learners through school-based and on-the-water education programs, worked with local governments to strengthen single-use plastic ordinances, and successfully advocated for stronger environmental safeguards in Santa Barbara's Cruise Ship Program. Volunteers have been at the heart of our work, with more than 4,800 people removing nearly 68,000 pounds of trash from local beaches and the Channel Islands.

As Channelkeeper looks ahead, we remain firmly dedicated to protecting the Channel and its watersheds. "Our work brings together science, community action, stronger alliances, and advocacy—and that combination has never been more important," Morton said. "As climate impacts intensify, we remain committed to protecting the incredibly special Santa Barbara Channel for the next 25 years and beyond."

OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS

The Fight for Our Coast Continues

Sable Offshore Corporation's aggressive effort to restart offshore oil drilling along the Gaviota Coast intensified in recent months to become a fast-moving, high-stakes battle involving local and state officials to federal regulators and the Trump administration, in addition to a deeply committed community determined to protect the coast.

The Santa Barbara community knows firsthand what is at risk from offshore drilling. The devastating 1969 blowout at Platform A in the Santa Barbara Channel ignited the modern environmental movement. Decades later, the 2015 Plains All American Oil Spill fouled local beaches and fisheries when a severely corroded onshore pipeline ruptured near Refugio State Beach, leading to a spill of 140,000 gallons of heavy crude oil. The spill closed beaches, shuttered fisheries, killed wildlife, and has cost more than \$850 million in response, cleanup, and damages. These events are not distant memories; they are our community's lived experiences.

In March—in an attempt to circumvent California State laws and regulations protecting the environment and overseeing pipeline safety—the Trump Administration invoked a Cold War-era statute to give Sable Offshore Corp. a green light to restart offshore oil development off the Gaviota Coast using the onshore pipeline system responsible for the devastating 2015 oil spill. The following day, Sable restarted drilling and began pumping oil through the pipeline—the same pipeline that the State Fire Marshal determined in the fall needed additional repairs before it could restart.

But the fight is not over. State officials are stepping up to challenge the Administration's order and assert their authority to protect our environment. California Attorney General Rob Bonta recently brought a lawsuit against the Trump Administration's action arguing that the Department of Energy has no authority under the Defense Production Act to excuse Sable from compliance with state and federal laws and court orders.



Channelkeeper continues to diligently work alongside the Environmental Defense Center and other groups to stop Sable from drilling off the Gaviota Coast and putting the Channel, coast, and community at risk of another disastrous oil spill.

Today, Channelkeeper stands shoulder to shoulder with conservation partners, local elected officials, students, researchers, and business leaders. The fight to protect the Gaviota Coast is far from over. In the courts, at public hearings, and with resolute community engagement, we are working to protect the Channel and coast from risks of another offshore oil disaster.

WATERSHED BRIGADE

Partnership Helps Protect the Channel Islands

Marine debris is a growing threat to the health of the Channel Islands. Wind and ocean currents carry trash from the mainland to the Islands' remote shores. Occasionally, fishing gear washes onshore after strong storms. These materials not only endanger sea life—including birds, fish, and marine mammals—but also degrade the habitats of species, including a few found nowhere else on Earth.

Channelkeeper has conducted cleanups at the Channel Islands for over a decade. Building upon years of informal collaboration, in 2024 our team partnered with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Island Packers, Santa Barbara Adventure Company, and the Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara to organize biannual cleanups on remote beaches of the Channel Islands. United around a common purpose to protect and restore vital marine environments, we join forces twice each year to fulfill a three-year grant from the NOAA Marine Debris program.

In September, our groups came together to remove approximately 650 pounds of trash and abandoned fishing gear from Chinese Harbor on Santa Cruz Island and Driftwood Cove on Anacapa Island. This successful effort shows how collaboration between federal agencies, nonprofits, local businesses, and community volunteers can create tangible environmental change, one shoreline at a time.



After a morning trip across the Channel, volunteers used kayaks and a skiff to get to shore. The team cleared lost fishing gear, plastic waste, and remnants of a sunken boat from the shoreline at Santa Cruz Island before moving to Anacapa Island, where we dug through driftwood to recover drink bottles, shoes, Styrofoam, and small plastic fragments. The collected debris was ferried on the skiff to an Island Packers vessel, which transported the waste back to the mainland for proper disposal. In addition, several fishermen

loaded heavy debris onto three fishing boats.

“Removing marine debris from the shorelines of Channel Islands National Park and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary is crucial to protecting the local ecosystem,” said Michaela Miller, Senior Conservation Manager for the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. “This cleanup effort showcases the power of collaboration, and we’re proud to work alongside our partners to steward these waters and remove debris from these fragile environments.”

These cleanups are part of a broader initiative led by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, in partnership with the NOAA Marine Debris Program, to remove marine debris from five national marine sanctuaries across California, Washington, and the Gulf of Mexico. After the federal funding for this project concludes next year, we will look for opportunities to continue these successful Island beach cleanups by seeking other funding sources and building on the results of a strong collaboration for meaningful environmental stewardship.



58,040 lbs.
of Trash Removed



2,404
Volunteers Engaged



987
Sites Cleaned

Cumulative statistics since May 2020.

WATER QUALITY MONITORING

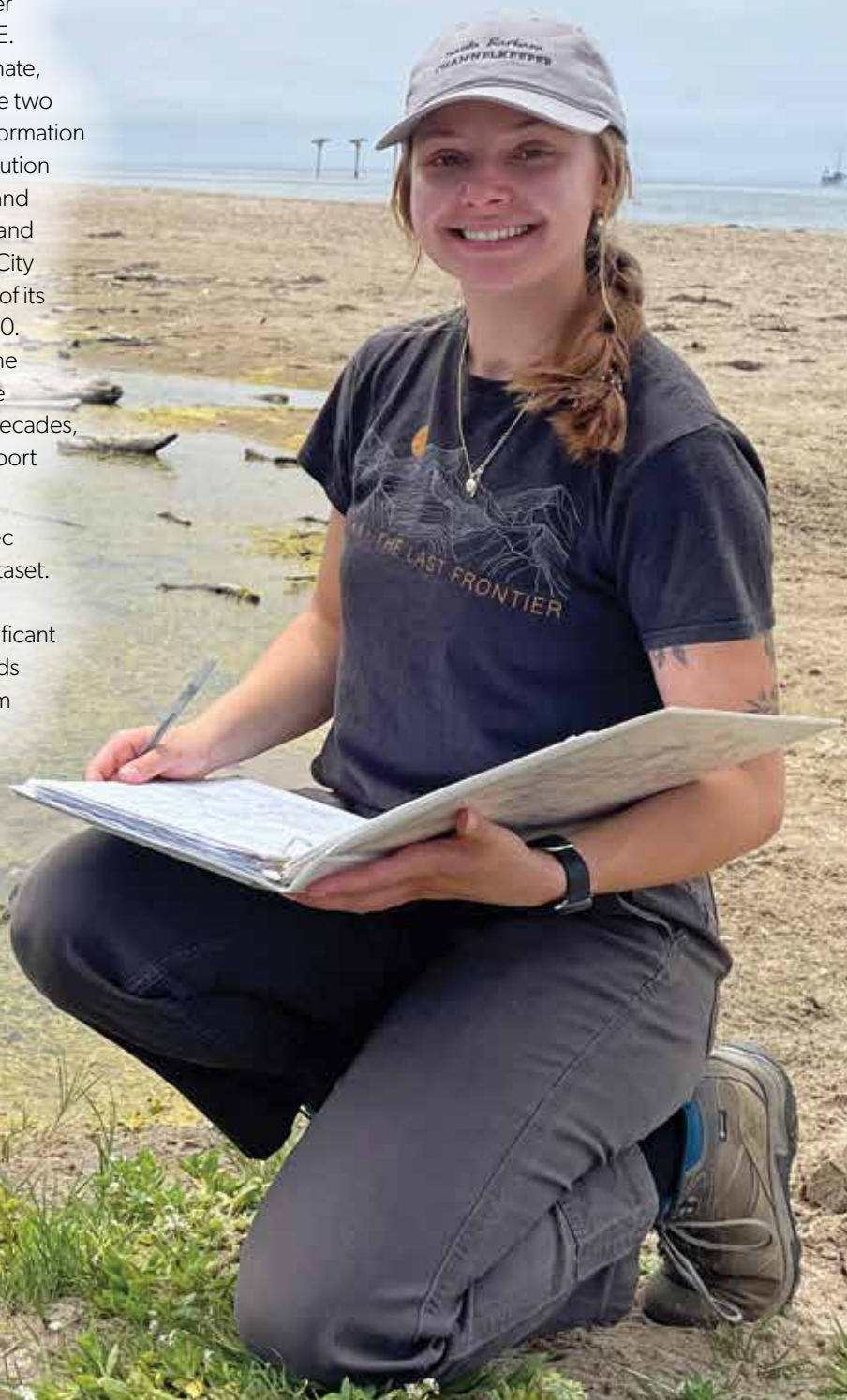
Data Informs Creek Management Decisions in Goleta

From 2002 to 2022, Channelkeeper's Stream Team carried out one of the longest-running community science water quality monitoring efforts in the region, collecting over 30,000 data points across twenty-six sites in creeks and along coastal areas throughout the Goleta Valley.

This dataset, which includes both dry and wet weather conditions, tracked eleven key parameters including E. coli, Enterococcus, dissolved oxygen, nitrate, phosphate, temperature, pH, turbidity, and conductivity. Over the two decades that the program ran, important baseline information about the health of the watershed was collected, pollution sources throughout the watersheds were identified, and hundreds of volunteers were trained to take samples and learned about the health of Goleta's waterways. The City of Goleta relied on this data during the development of its Creek and Watershed Management Plan in 2019-2020. During this process, Channelkeeper staff served on the City's Technical Advisory Committee, provided all the data that had been collected over the previous two decades, contributed historical reports, and voiced public support for the plan's adoption.

In 2022, the City of Goleta contracted with Geosyntec Consultants to conduct an in-depth analysis of the dataset. The report revealed patterns typical of urban creeks. While only a few parameters showed statistically significant changes over time, the analysis did indicate high trends such as increasing temperature and pH from upstream to downstream. The findings offered key insight into water quality trends and areas of concern, which can be used to help identify priorities for watershed management.

Channelkeeper has signed a three-year agreement to continue monitoring creeks throughout the Goleta Valley Watershed. For this period, college students and recent graduates are being trained to collect the samples and build on the long-term data set.



CRUISE SHIP ADVOCACY

Public Participation Drives Cruise Ship Reforms

Cruise ships have visited Santa Barbara's shores for nearly two decades. Shortly after the COVID related pause on cruise ship visits, thirty cruise ships arrived in Santa Babara. In 2023 and 2024, fueled by an increasing number of ship visits and growing concerns over pollution, whale strikes, and the impacts of large vessels on our coast, Channelkeeper led a wave of activism that resulted in a significant policy change.

Over the course of many public meetings organized by a subcommittee of the Harbor Commission, we advanced a set of recommendations and worked with city leaders to reshape the City's cruise ship program. At these meetings, swimmers, paddlers, beachgoers, and concerned neighbors shared their viewpoints and stories. Momentum grew.



In April 2024, the City Council approved a set of twenty recommendations which included many of the ones that Channelkeeper and dedicated community members promoted. Key improvements included capping the number of cruise ship visits to twenty annually, requiring advanced wastewater treatment systems, and reducing speeds to ten knots in the Channel to avoid ship strikes with whales and minimize air pollution.

In July 2025, staff of the Waterfront Department provided an update on its first full year of implementing the recommendations. They reported that eleven ships visited Santa Barbara in the Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 seasons. Seven are scheduled for the Fall 2025 season. All visiting ships are equipped with improved wastewater treatment systems. The staff also reported on a revised fee structure and announced a publicly accessible database to provide the community information about the program.

At the July meeting, Channelkeeper's policy associate Nate Irwin acknowledged the positive steps and offered to support the implementation of the recommendations, including prioritizing ships with solid environmental compliance records.

This achievement demonstrates the power of community activism to affect change. Insights shared by key participants captured the spirit that local voices can shape the future of our coast.

"The community of Santa Barbara has been a leader in climate activism for years," says John Cunningham, a stalwart community activist. "Maria and I feel that expressing that spirit today is more important than ever. Now is the time for us to unleash our individual superpowers to preserve and protect this splendid home for our children and their children. The hidden surprise of getting involved has come from interacting with all of the wonderful people who work together for the benefit of this beautiful place. In this community we've found that when each person brings their own passion, change becomes attainable through the concerted efforts of all of us."

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Sparking Curiosity and Stewardship

When Fatima Gonzalez Reyes first stepped aboard Channelkeeper's boat, she was just eight years old—curious, excited, and a little bit nervous. Now, as a high school senior at San Marcos High School, she reflects on her many years of hands-on learning experiences with Channelkeeper's environmental education programs and how they helped shape both her understanding of the ocean and her role in protecting it.

Fatima connected with Channelkeeper as a student in the Turner Foundation's education program. Her early participation in Channelkeeper's Seafari Cruises, where students learn about marine ecosystems, local wildlife, and environmental threats, opened her eyes to the diversity of life beneath the surface.

"Seeing the dolphins up close was my favorite part. I'll never forget it. There were so many, and they were really playful," she says. "It made me happy."

This kind of awe-inspiring, hands-on learning is exactly what Channelkeeper hopes to provide through our youth environmental education programs. Students collect plankton on Seafari Cruises, test water quality in the Ventura River, and learn about marine biology while kayaking through the Santa Barbara Harbor in Shore to Sea Explorers. They are immersed in the science of their local environment and empowered to connect with it on a personal level.

For Fatima, the impact went beyond a memorable day on the water. When the Turner Foundation joined Channelkeeper the following year for a beach cleanup, she saw first-hand how trash impacts marine environments.

"We saw so much plastic, especially bottles," she explains. "After that, my dad and I started collecting bottles regularly and taking them to the recycling center," she says. "It made me more aware of how the small things we do on land can affect the ocean."

This awareness sparked her curiosity. For a biology class project, Fatima and her classmates researched how container ship traffic and underwater noise pollution are affecting whales in the Santa Barbara Channel. "It made me think about how human actions, especially things we don't see, really impact marine life," she says. "I learned that even though there are laws in place, a lot of ships don't follow them. It really opened my eyes to the bigger picture," she explains, "and it made me want to learn more."



Then and now: Fatima Gozalez Reyes exploring the ocean with Channelkeeper as a third grader and last summer as a high school student.

Fatima believes that educational programs like Channelkeeper's are important to help young people connect with science and environmental issues. While she is still exploring options for the future, her time on the water has left a lasting impression.

"These adventures are fun, and they make you more aware," she says. "You start to realize that even small things like how you throw away your trash can affect the ocean and the environment. That's pretty powerful."

SUPPORTER APPRECIATION

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KEEPING WATCH FOR CLEAN WATER

STUDENT ART SHOW – MAY 7, 2026

Please join us for Channelkeeper's 23rd annual student art show on May 7, 2026, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Jody House (625 Chapala St.). The show, themed "What the Channel Means to Me," inspires local students to reflect on their connection to the Santa Barbara Channel and to create art that celebrates the area's natural beauty and diversity. Student award-winners will be announced at the artist reception and award ceremony at 6:00 p.m. Special thanks to show sponsor Trillium Enterprises, Inc. and the City of Goleta Grant Program for their support.



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 become an MPA Watch volunteer and help monitor marine protected areas along our coast. <https://www.sbck.org/volunteer/>

