

MEETING SUMMARY

Santa Ana Sucker Conservation Team

April 23, 2015

ATTENDEES:

Angelica Mendoza, USFS
Bob Packard, MSHCP
Bonnie Johnson, OCWD
Brett Mills, RCRC
Ed Filadelfia, City of Riverside
Greg Herzog, City of Riverside
Hannah Smith, SBMWD
Heather Dyer, SBVMWD

Kai Palenscar, USFWS
Kerwin Russell, RCRC
Maricela Archer, SAWA
Rebecca Franklin, SBMWD
Zully Smith, RCFC&WCD
Phone: Steve Loe, Independent
Phone: Joanna Gibson, CDFW
Ian Achimore, SAWPA
Zyanya Blancas, SAWPA

Introductions and Announcement:

The Santa Ana Sucker Conservation Team (Conservation Team) meeting was called to order at 1:36 P.M. by Ian Achimore at the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority (SAWPA) located at 11615 Sterling Avenue, Riverside, CA 92503. Brief introductions were made.

Meeting Summary Approval:

Ian Achimore asked for any comments or corrections to the January 22, 2015 meeting notes. The meeting notes were approved as submitted.

Upper Santa Ana River Tributary Discussion: Heather Dyer, SBVMWD

Under the One Water One Watershed 2015 (Proposition 84) grant solicitation, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District (SBVMWD) along with Eastern Municipal Water District (EMWD), Western Municipal Water District (WMWD), Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA), and Orange County Water District (OCWD), will be submitting a multi-agency integrated project named the Santa Ana River Conservation and Conjunctive Use Program (SARCCUP). If funded, the project will focus on the removal of *Arundo donax*, habitat creation for the Santa Ana sucker fish, water use efficiency programs and integrated groundwater banking throughout the Santa Ana River Watershed.

Heather Dyer provided a PowerPoint presentation on the habitat-related component of SARCCUP. It was indicated that 5,000 acres to-date of *Arundo donax* has been removed. If the grant is approved, OCWD will take the lead in removing the remaining *Arundo* in the Santa Ana River, which is approximately at 1,000 acres, within the next five years. Five tributary sites were chosen to be restored for the sucker fish: Evans Lake Drain, Old Farm Road, Anza Drain, Lower Hole Creek and Hidden Valley Wetlands. Restoration would include activities such as grading/excavation of channels, bank stabilization, re-countouring to direct flow, supplemental water supply, fish passage structures, and substrate enhancement. Greg Herzog stated that Riverside City Parks is interested in the Evans Lake project and possibly installing a trail along the riparian native habitat.

White Paper: Benefits of Membership

The Conservation Team's funding partners and Ian Achimore worked on a white paper for the Santa Ana Sucker Conservation Team. The development of a white paper was proposed in order to solicit new funding partners for the Conservation Team. No further comments were made during the meeting and Ian Achimore stated it would be posted on the Conservation Team's website at sawpa.org/sucker.

Team Projects: Illegal Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use River Sweep and Education

In a previous meeting there was interest in partnering with local law enforcement agencies for the prevention of OHVs in the upper portion of the River as vehicle use can damage sucker habitat. Mr. Achimore briefly summarized the proposed use of funds by the local authority agencies that SAWPA had collected since the last Conservation Team meeting. Some agencies proposed active and passive action plans. Active plans are focused on educating OHV users, whereas passive plans would enforce local codes and ordinances. Discussion ensued on the details of proposed plans. The Conservation Team funding partners agreed that the City of Colton's proposed plan for active enforcement had the potential for reducing OHV use in a frequently used portion of the River.

MOVED, approve the use of \$8,000 for 1) three active enforcement events with the City of Colton by the City's Police Department, 2) encourage coordination of events with other agencies during key weekends, and 3) fund signage along the Santa Ana River Trail related to preventing OHV use.

Results:	Adopted (Unanimously; 3-0)
Motion/Second:	Dyer/Zemba
Ayes:	Dyer, Herzog, Zemba
Nays:	None

There was discussion about issues of homelessness in the River. Zully Smith stated that Riverside County Flood Control District had spent \$242,000 in the last four years cleaning up encampments. Going forward, the District's plan is to have a biologist pre-survey the impact of clearing the encampments and then bringing a hazmat contractor on-board. She stated that 40-50 to homeless persons live in the river area. Mr. Palenscar said that San Bernardino County Flood Control District was planning on removing three encampments between Riverside Avenue and the RIX facility the following week.

Team Projects: Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) Funding Submittal for Santa Ana Sucker Habitat Protection and Beneficial Use Enhancement

Ian Achimore announced the submittal of a proposal for the Santa Ana Sucker Habitat Protection and Beneficial Use Enhancement project for SEP funding from the Regional Board for \$100,000. SEP funds are available from the Regional Board as it is authorized to issue administrative civil liability complaints to dischargers under the California Water Code in response to violations of waste discharge requirements, discharge prohibitions, enforcement orders, or other orders of the Regional Board..

The Project goal is to create habitat in Reach IV of the Santa Ana River. Presently, Kai Palenscar surveyed possible locations to create habitat by placing various rock sizes (e.g. half ton, quarter ton) between Market Street and Riverside Drive, specifically where there is a perennial source of water. Discussion ensued on the logistics and possible result from this project.

Dick Zemba asked about the status of habitat in the proposed project area, and Mr. Palenscar stated that it was poor based on surveys in January, 2015. He noted that fairly recent storms brought a lot of sediment downstream and that the quality of habitat is really dependent on the latest rain event. OCWD stated that adding more rock is expensive and that removing the fine particles off of the covered layer of cobble/rock using a suction dredge would be beneficial. Mr. Zemba added that due to past U.S. Geological Survey studies most fine particles are slowly transported through the system during periods of low-flow. Mr. Palenscar stated that the placement of larger rocks will increase the velocity of water and will increase the number of pools in the area. Ms. Dyer stated that OCWD's proposal has merit in Rialto Channel where there is low sediment supplied by upstream flows and not large amounts of water, and the resulting habitat benefit would be immediate.

Mr. Zembal drew on OCWD's experience from a similar project implemented near Hamner Road where the agency installed a ladder of gabions on both sides of the river. Individually, the gabions extended from the bank by nine feet and were staggered 150 feet apart from each other. On the South shore, the flowing water cut a hole at the toe of the gabions, picked up speed and created some local scour. Mr. Zembal pointed out that from the further upstream gabion to the furthest downstream gabion, a sand bar was created and at the foot of the bar was a drop-off that exposed gravel below it. He noted that in consultation with his engineering staff, a beneficial design would be to place a cement slab eight feet deep within the channel, while simultaneously mounting it to the bank. The resulting cobble exposure would be quickened if several of the structures were placed closer together. Ms. Dyer proposed using what OCWD learned and apply it to this upstream effort. Mr. Russell noted that the SARCCUP tributary projects are very different than a mainstem project that would occur in the 1,200 foot-wide river channel because there isn't as much meandering in tributaries.

Mr. Palenscar clarified that placing rock in the river is not a permanent fix for sucker habitat. Kerwin Russell stated that the Riverside County Flood Control groins above Riverside Drive provide a stationary structure that creates scour and pools that are a meter deep. Ms. Smith stated the purpose of the groins is to protect the levees. After the storms of 2010 and 2011, the District noted there was scour on the levees. When the groins were first created, they did an excellent job of keeping the meandering of the wetted channel into the middle of the River. She noted that back in the 1970s the River was much different as it had no vegetation and very little water flowing. Mr. Russell stated that between January and April the system has changed, and most rock/cobble will be exposed by late summer.

Ms. Smith noted that the District has done a sediment transport analysis to determine if the River is stable. There are areas where they have noted that a build-up of sediment has created drop-offs. The report is not finalized yet but it will help inform whether additional rock at the toe of the levee improve the stabilization of the system.

Critical Habitat Litigation Update

In a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, there were oral arguments made on March 5, 2015 regarding the Critical Habitat Litigation. Both sides gave their arguments; however, a decision was not made. No date was set for the verdict.

Red Algae Update

At a previous Conservation Team meeting, it was discussed possibly partnering with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to realigning the river flow in an effort to eradicate the *Compsopogon Coeruleus* (Red Algae). After translocating rocks with Red Algae from the RIX outfall to Rialto channels, it was discovered that the Red Algae died off in the Rialto Channel relatively quickly. A major difference of the outfall and the channel is temperature – Rialto Channel is colder than the RIX outfall, and the RIX outfall's temperature is more constant. Thus, it was proposed that the river need be approximately 20 degrees colder for at least two weeks to eliminate the Red Algae. It is unclear how the river will be chilled; however Kai Palenscar of the USFWS is awaiting a response from the USACE regarding the logistics and feasibility. Mr. Palenscar noted that the algae has been spotted near the I-15 freeway and stated that the Red Algae has done better in the upper watershed than the lower portion.

Restoration Project Updates

Sunnyslope Creek

Maricela Archer provided a video showing a group of about 27 Santa Ana sucker fish in the Sunnyslope Creek. This video was taken with a GoPro camera in February, 2015 in the lower portion of the Creek. SAWA and OCWD scheduled to monitor the Creek the following Thursday. Ms. Archer stated that this year, the plan is to monitor quarterly, unless there's a major rain event.

Tequesquite Creek

Mr. Russell noted that there are currently fish at the mouth of the confluence of the creek and the main stem, but the connectivity is lost about every few months. Mr. Russell noted that RCRCDC is in the process of securing two wells that are within a building. Ms. Dyer voiced concern over the future of these wells and stated it is unsure what would happen if the lot were sold. The wells are connected to the creek. The price is being negotiated. Discussion ensued on the ownership rights over the wells and possible use to water the Creek.

Next Meeting and Adjournment:

The next Conservation Team meeting was scheduled for Thursday, July 23, 2015.