

Santa Ana Sucker Conservation Team Meeting



Conservation Team

March 13, 2025

In attendance:

Alonso Jurado, CBWM
Brett Mills, RCRC
Cameron Macbeth, OCWD
Christine Medak, FWS
Ileene Anderson, Center for Biological Diversity
John Russ, IEUA
Kai Palenscar, Valley District

Kevin Israel, ECORP Consulting
Leighanne Kirk, EMWD
Nate Scheevel, Scheevel Engineering
Sheryl Parsons, OCWD
William McDonnell, IEUA
Ian Achimore, SAWPA
Zyanya Ramirez, SAWPA

INTRODUCTIONS

The Santa Ana Sucker Conservation Team (Conservation Team) meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Ian Achimore via Zoom at the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority (SAWPA) located at 11615 Sterling Avenue, Riverside, CA 92503.

REVIEW NOVEMBER 18, 2024 MEETING SUMMARY

The November 18, 2024 meeting summary was approved as posted.

2024 RIVERWALK DATA AND DRAFT ATLAS REPORT

Ian Achimore presented the updated 2024 Riverwalk results and the draft multi-year Atlas Report summarizing 19 years of Riverwalk data. He explained the survey method, which measures channel width and visually estimates substrate categories used to assign habitat quality ratings for Santa Ana sucker. The 2024 Riverwalk was able to survey 102 transect points, with several inaccessible points near River Road due to dense vegetation and braided flows, and one transect missing due to app-sync issues.

The Conservation Team reviewed habitat patterns, noting an unusually high number of marginal-quality transects and the presence of two high-quality points near the downstream end, a deviation from prior years. Members raised questions about uniform gravel percentages across several transects, which Ian will investigate. It was noted that some unmeasured downstream transects were dry during the survey. The draft Atlas will be open for two weeks of review before final publication.

2025 RIVERWALK PILOT DATA

The Conservation Team received an overview of the first winter pilot Riverwalk survey conducted February 3–4, 2025, intended to capture post-storm substrate conditions to compare against the traditional fall surveys. Because winter conditions can increase turbidity and coincide with sucker spawning season, the pilot focuses on two groups – Group 1 and Group 10. The only qualifying storm occurred January 26, and surveyors reported that it did not significantly disturb vegetation or cause turbidity, allowing clear visibility of the substrate. Preliminary comparisons indicated a slight downstream shift in the transition from good to marginal habitat, suggesting redistribution of sand following storm flows. Members discussed sediment transport dynamics and the influence of multiple flow sources, particularly in the upstream Group 1 area in Colton. Additional discussion highlighted unusual coarse substrate conditions

near River Road that may be occurring due to sediment diverting into dense vegetation, leaving cleaner groundwater-fed flows to erode the bed. SAWPA staff will seek comments on the pilot results and evaluate whether to conduct future winter surveys, potentially guided by a defined precipitation threshold.

FYE 2026 AND FYE 2027 TEAM BUDGET

Ian Achimore presented the updated two-year budget, noting that revenues remain steady at approximately \$30,000–\$43,000 annually, with a projected increase in SAWPA member agency contributions still pending formal approval. Labor costs have risen due to expanded Riverwalk coordination and data processing. As expenditures now exceed annual revenues, the team will draw on reserves, which have declined from \$111,000 at the beginning of FY 2025 and are projected to fall to approximately \$8,000 by the end of FY 2027 if current trends continue. Ian emphasized the need to secure additional revenue, either through new members, increased contributions, or grants, to maintain long-term sustainability. The draft budget will be circulated for adoption by funding stakeholders.

TRIBUTARY UPDATES

Sunnyslope Creek – OCWD/SAWA Staff

OCWD reported plans to remove blockages from the upper reach of Sunnyslope Creek to the Santa Ana River to maintain fish passage. Seasonal debris accumulation is expected due to Santa Ana wind events and recent storms.

Tequesquite Creek – RCRCDC Staff

RCRCDC reported that a recent fire burned the middle-lower portion of the creek, removing invasives but significantly altering the habitat. In addition, a previously observed population of chub in the upper section was no longer present during January field checks, prompting questions about dispersal or loss following hydrologic changes.

Upper SAR Habitat Conservation Plan Tributaries

SBVMWD reported ongoing restoration efforts across Hole, Anza, Old Ranch, and Hidden Valley Creeks. Extensive palm removal—approximately 2,000 trees so far—continues, with trunks staged for later biomass removal. Channel alignment and vegetation clearing work is underway to prepare for tributary enhancement projects planned to break ground in late summer or fall 2025. A recent fish survey documented several large suckers in Anza Creek, indicating active use of the tributary.

FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Kai Palenscar provided an update on the January spill of “rhomboid” plastic balls from an upstream overflow, thanking agencies that assisted with cleanup efforts and requesting that any remaining sightings along the river be reported for tracking. No additional future topics were proposed.

If there are any topics for future discussion, send your requests to Ian Achimore at iachimore@sawpa.gov.