

Summer 2023



SOAR IS THE VOTERS' LAW

Most know SOAR for protecting open space and farmland. Yet another benefit of SOAR is that it increases democracy by engaging and empowering voters with the decision to direct growth. It is based on the belief that voters are more protective of our natural resources than elected officials who may be unduly influenced by urban sprawl developers.

For example, the candidate who raised the most money in the race for Ventura County Supervisor in 2022 had one-fourth of his campaign paid for by the real estate and construction industry.

One way to lessen special interest influence in land use decisions is to limit how much money candidates can receive from a contributor. Creating an even playfield where the public's voice can be heard over the voices of wealthy contributors is good for democracy and government. That's why the SOAR organization joined with hundreds of residents in opposing the recent repeal of Ventura County's campaign contribution limits. The repeal, approved by Supervisors Kelly Long, Janice Parvin and Jeff Gorell, removes the County's \$750 maximum contribution limit. As a result, Supervisors can now take seven times that amount, \$5,500 per person.

While it is unfortunate that money will play a greater role in county politics, it's good to know that SOAR cannot be repealed by the Board of Supervisors or any city council. It remains the "law of the land" keeping Ventura County cities from sprawling into each other, by vote of the people. ☆

OVER 2000 NATIVE PLANT SPECIES!

BY DAVID L. MAGNEY,
CERTIFIED CONSULTING BIOLOGIST

The native flora of Ventura County is relatively rich when comparing it to all 58 California counties. Ventura County has 2,006 native species (including subspecies and varieties), containing almost one third of all the native plants found in California. That is amazing considering Ventura County only represents 1% of the land area of the state.

Ventura County flora ranks second only to San Bernardino County, which is much larger! Why so rich? Location, location, location. Ventura County is located in a Goldilocks area where the geography and climate are just right for a tremendous variety of native plants. It is situated in an area of extreme ranges in topography (sea level to 8,831 feet), geographic and climatic influences from the coast, Mojave Desert, Sierra Nevada, and central coast ranges, and a variety of geologic formations and soil types.

Many of the 2,006 native taxa occurring in the county are rare, either globally, statewide, or in Ventura County. Thankfully SOAR helps protect native flora from human-caused impacts so they will be here for generations to come. ☆



NAVIGATING THE LONG-TERM PRESERVATION OF THE SANTA CLARA RIVER WATERSHED

BY CANDICE MENEGHIN, FRIENDS OF THE SANTA CLARA RIVER

Friends of the Santa Clara River have been protecting the ecological and cultural resources of the watershed for 30 years, and this year we've set our sights on the long-term protection and sustainability of the Santa Clara River, which spans both Los Angeles and Ventura counties.

We're driving an effort to establish a collaborative entity that will formally bring partners together to provide a cohesive conservation framework to guide long-term protection, address ongoing operations and maintenance needs, and provide a funding mechanism for climate-resilient conservation and restoration projects watershed-wide.

Friends became stewards of Hedrick Ranch Nature Area as the first purchase into the Santa Clara River Parkway Project by the California State Coastal Conservancy in 2001. The primary goal of the Parkway Project is the acquisition, conservation, and restoration of floodplain lands within the river corridor.

SOAR is instrumental in safeguarding open space in Ventura County and remains a vital land use policy to complement the protection of the Parkway.

Santa Paula youth learn Chumash plant uses at Fillmore Hatchery Ethnobotany Trail.

Over the last two decades, Friends and local land trusts – The Nature Conservancy's LA-Ventura Project, Ventura Land Trust, Santa Clara River Conservancy, and partners such as Stillwater Sciences and UC Santa Barbara have all been stewarding properties throughout the watershed. These individual efforts have helped conserve and restore aquatic and riparian habitats for native species and the hydrologic and geomorphic processes that create and maintain those habitats. They have also enhanced flood protection for adjacent private land and public facilities, and provided opportunities for public access and environmental education.

Considering recent 30x30 goals at the state and federal levels to save open space, commitments in the County's 2040 General Plan, and the known threats from climate change and biodiversity collapse, protecting the Santa Clara River and floodplain is vital. The river sustains our local agricultural economy, connects five bioregions of global biodiversity importance, and supports over two dozen specially protected animal and plant species. We welcome the input of SOAR supporters as we continue to explore options such as a special district, joint powers authority, memorandum of understanding, and/or a conservancy to continue the preservation and management of these important resources. ☆

ELIMINATING MICRO-PLASTICS TO SAVE WILDLIFE

BY BENJAMIN PITTERLE, M.E.S.M.
DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY AND FIELD OPERATIONS, LOS PADRES FORESTWATCH



The term “*microtrash*” refers to what most of us think of as common litter: cigarette butts, plastic straws, food wrappers, etc. Micro-plastic – generally created when larger plastic items breakdown into smaller bits and pieces - is perhaps the most insidious form of microtrash. From the Great Pacific Garbage Patch to the discovery of microplastic fibers in fish tissue and deep ocean sediments, the impact of this form of pollution on marine ecosystems has been a focus of concern for conservation groups and scientists for many years. Microtrash is also impacting our local Ventura County terrestrial ecosystems in significant ways.

According to the National Park Service, ingestion of microtrash is the current leading cause of death for condor nestlings. Condors are known to feed bone and

seashell fragments to chicks, presumably as a source of calcium. Unfortunately, adult birds sometimes also mistakenly scavenge and return microtrash back to their nests. When microtrash is brought to the nest and regurgitated by an adult condor, it is often ingested by condor chicks and these chicks are not able to regurgitate like their adult counterparts. Therefore, microtrash can get stuck in the stomach of condor chicks and cause impaction, which prevents them from digesting food, resulting in starvation and death if condor biologists do not intervene and surgically remove the trash.

This winter, rainfall revitalized our parched backcountry landscapes. Creeks are flowing and swimming holes are full again. **As we approach the brink of summer, and flocks of humans explore our backcountry areas for recreation, it’s critical to be ever-mindful of our waste-products. Practice leave-no-trace. Carry a receptacle for your trash. Pick up after others whenever possible.** Participate in an organized creek or backcountry cleanup event. Your efforts will not only help keep Ventura County beautiful but may also protect endangered iconic species like the California Condor. ☆

To sign up for volunteer cleanup events in the Los Padres with Los Padres ForestWatch, contact ForestWatch at volunteer@LPFW.org.



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KEEPING SOAR STRONG

A New Tool for Donors!

SOAR has made it one step easier for those who would like to leave a legacy of protecting open space and farmland. Planned giving options are now presented in a short slide presentation that can be viewed at SOARVC.org/donate/legacy. See how you can help ensure the SOAR laws continue far into the future by setting aside a gift as part of your estate.

Contact us at

donate@soarvc.org

to include SOAR in your planned giving.