



FACT SHEET

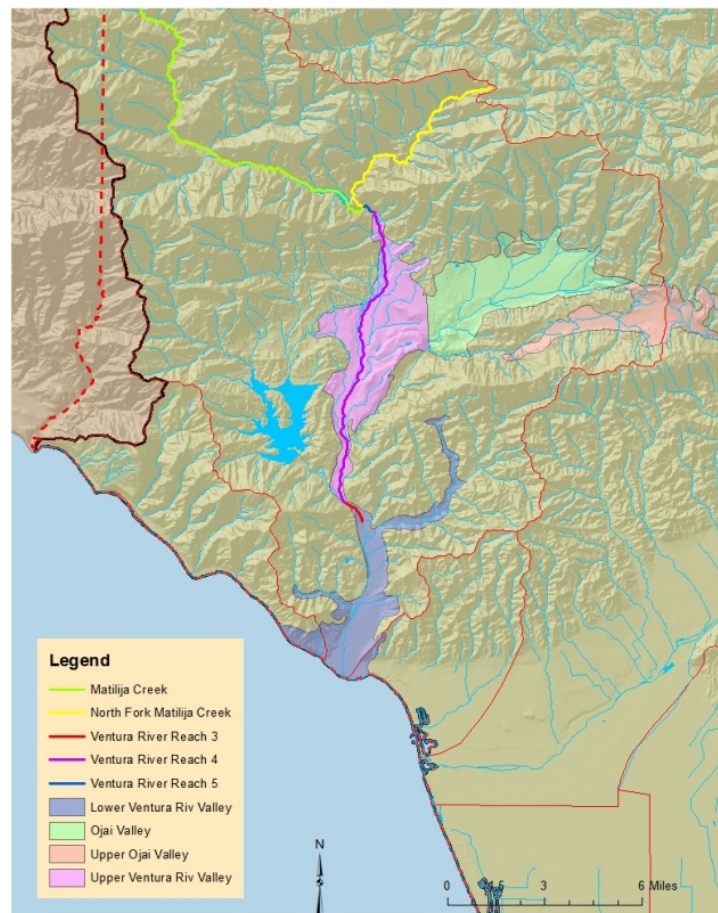
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Ventura River Water Diversions/Pumping Impairments

Protection of surface and ground waters in California is the responsibility of the State Water Resources Control Board (located in Sacramento) and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards spread throughout the State. The area covered by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (LA Water Board) includes coastal Ventura and Los Angeles Counties. While these Boards enforce State regulations such as the California Water Code, they also have the authority and responsibility to enforce the federal Clean Water Act. The latter requires biennial assessments of the country's waters and their ability to support certain beneficial uses such as water contact recreation, commercial fishing, and use by aquatic life. During an assessment in 1996, beneficial uses relating to maintenance of the endangered Southern California steelhead trout population in the Ventura River Reaches 3 (Weldon Canyon to confluence with Coyote Creek @Casitas Vista/Santa Ana Rd) and 4 (Coyote Creek to Camino Cielo Rd) were determined to be impaired by the LA Water Board based on the information available at the time. Water quality impairments are generally addressed through establishment of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), which document sources of the pollutants of concern and the amount of pollutant reduction needed in order to fully support beneficial uses. Several environmental organizations challenged USEPA (as the federal agency charged with implementing the Clean Water Act) over the pace at which TMDLs were being developed in the Los Angeles Region. In 1999, a consent decree between USEPA and the environmental organizations led to a detailed schedule for completion of all listed impairments. USEPA must either establish or approve State-adopted consent decree TMDLs in the Los Angeles Region on or before certain dates; in the case of the Ventura River water diversion/pumping impairments, the deadline for establishing a plan to address the impairment is March 24, 2013.

Ventura River Watershed, Groundwater Basins, and Stream Reaches



Development of TMDLs is the usual approach taken to address impaired waters since generally impairments are caused by chemicals occurring in excess amounts and the best way to remove the impairment is to establish a plan to reduce the pollutant loads as needed to meet a target concentration that does not cause problems. However, the water diversion/pumping impairments are quite unique and could be addressed through another approach that shows “alternate programs” are in place or will be in place to resolve the impairments. If documentation of these programs and commitment to their implementation does not occur in a timely manner such that the deadline can be met by USEPA, then a TMDL will be developed by USEPA by March 24, 2013, identifying the steps that must be taken by various parties to resolve the impairments.

The LA Water Board is proposing to address the impairment in Reach 3 through delisting (removing it from the impaired waters list); after review of all available data and information, it appears this impairment may have been incorrectly assigned originally. Regarding the Reach 4 impairment, the LA Water Board sees the alternative programs approach as an opportunity for development of an array of solutions with the close involvement of watershed stakeholders. The goal would be to identify solutions that reduce anthropogenic impacts from diversions and pumping to steelhead trout over-summering habitat, particularly pools. The LA Water Board would act as a facilitator in the process since its only direct authority in this matter is over assessing attainment of beneficial uses and the subsequent listing or delisting of impaired waters. While only surface waters can be designated as impaired under the Clean Water Act, it is clear in this watershed that surface and ground waters are closely interconnected. Surface water diversions can affect the amount of water available to pumpers while pumpers can remove enough water such that flowing water or pools where steelhead trout may live during the summer months may be depleted. However, the issues of concern to the survival of steelhead trout also apply to the availability of water for human consumption. Thus, the oversight and appropriate management of the resource as a whole by federal, State and local agencies and stakeholders can benefit both humans and fish.

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or similar document would be needed by no later than fall 2012 among implementing agencies/parties in order to establish the degree of commitment needed to serve as an alternative to a USEPA established TMDL. Stakeholders are encouraged to participate in relevant meetings and other activities publicized by the Ventura River Watershed Council www.venturawatershed.org or its affiliated agencies and work collaboratively toward effective solutions to address these impairments. Additional information may be obtained from Shirley Birosik, Staff Environmental Scientist, Los Angeles Water Board, at (213) 576-6679 and sbirosik@waterboards.ca.gov.