



Ventura River Watershed Council

Meeting Summary

Wednesday, October 3, 2012

Our mission is to facilitate and support efforts by individuals, agencies, and organizations to maintain and improve the health and sustainability of the Ventura River watershed for the benefit of the people and ecosystems that depend upon it.

Public Scoping Meeting on the Ventura River Watershed Management Plan

A Public Scoping Meeting to discuss and obtain input for development of a Ventura River Watershed Management Plan was held at the Oak View Community Room, Oak View on the evening of October 3. A total of 60 people showed up for the meeting, which was a good turnout since it was held on the same night as the first Presidential debate. For 28 of the people in attendance, this was their first Watershed Council meeting.

After a brief overview presentation and introductions, participants had the opportunity to write on a card their "biggest concern" and their "best idea" with regard to the watershed. These cards were collected and then read aloud so we could all hear each other's concerns and ideas.

Then we had a discussion on a variety of watershed topics including groundwater concerns, the cost/hassle/time of permits to clear channels and remove Arundo, the need for education, Matilija Dam, steelhead, the need to affect policy, pesticides, the cost-effectiveness of schemes to enhance our water supplies, the threat of fires, economic considerations, graywater, the need to balance the demands on our limited water, and more.

After hearing the written and spoken ideas of others, participants had an opportunity to fill out another card summarizing what they believe to be the five biggest concerns and five best ideas, as well as any questions they had.

The "biggest concerns" and "best ideas" are summarized below. I put the ideas first. We got some good ones, and this is where the rubber meets the road in terms of our watershed management plan (WMP). I've attempted to organized the ideas by our seven WMP goal categories, and then to sub-organize them by the means by which the idea would be implemented, in other words by type of project or program. Many of the ideas straddle categories, and you'll see that sometimes I repeated ideas in more than one category. And sometimes the ideas weren't stated clearly enough for me to be certain of the intent of the author, so I had to make some assumptions. (These factors also make it impossible to do any kind of fair statistical summary.)

The concerns/ideas statements speak for themselves. But there was one theme that came across very strongly in the discussion that is not quite as emphasized in the statements, and that is how frustrated stakeholders are with regulations and permit requirements that effectively prevent them from taking beneficial actions, such as keeping drainage channels cleared so they don't clog in storms. Related to this is the number of permits required to do any work and lack of an integrated permitting process. There were statements about it taking over a year to get permits to work in streams, or of one required permit expiring before all the other permits were issued. And the prohibitive cost of permits was part of this discussion.

We received lots of positive feedback from those in attendance about the meeting and the process, and we got what we wanted: to hear the concerns of people "on the ground" in the watershed, to see which issues were of greatest concern, and identify patterns from the feedback.

A BIG THANKS to Paul Jenkin, Bill O'Brien, Emily Ayala, Vickie Peters, Lisa Brenneis, Ojai Valley Land Conservancy and whoever brought the pistachios for helping with refreshments. And a special thanks to Ann Rosecrance, rock star event promoter.

Best Ideas

Sufficient Water Supply/Balancing Supply with Competing Demands

Educate/Motivate

- Incentives for residential and commercial use of native plants and water conservation.
- Encourage use of drought resistant plants - less grass/thirsty plants.
- Promote alternative water sources i.e., water conservation, greywater, infiltration, recycled water.
- Conservation education plan that individuals can implement on their own land, e.g. ocean friendly gardens, rainwater capture, etc.
- Settlement/recharge/infiltration incentives.
- Promote infiltration of stormwater.
- Provide incentives for water conservation.
- Provide homeowner landscaping workshops and rain gardens/River Friendly Gardens.
- Ag water use – look at water and importance to meet needs of local/regional food demands, including efficient irrigation, crop selection workshops.
- Reduce demands.
- More education on how to stop using potable drinking water for large lawns, capture rainwater to put into the landscape. Collectively manage our shared resources.
- Make everyone understand what comes out of sewer plant - clean water. No chemicals used.
- Education of water conservation.
- Make everyone aware we have a limited supply.

Study

- Hydrogeological study of the watershed.

Amend or Enforce Policies and Regulations/Involve Regulators

- Eliminate requirement of landscaped parkway in residential neighborhoods.
- Groundwater recharge - can we change paving protocols in cities and the County?
- Consumption use restrictions for landowners using groundwater and surface water and water district that are adequate to maintain adequate water for ecosystem, farmers, wildlife use (including fisheries).
- Require ag to harvest and contain rain water and contour land with swales to increase onsite water storage.

Improve Infrastructure

- Capture storm flow via off-stream diversion ponds. If a simple weir gate were installed adjacent to the stream channel that could be overtopped by higher than normal flows, and closed when needed, then some portion of a flood flow could be captured for groundwater recharge. Accumulated sediments could be collected and used.
- Store tertiary treated wastewater in the winter to be released in dry weather.
- Contour ditches to slow it, sink it and store it.
- Groundwater recharge - I liked the idea of 100s of small projects - Is agricultural acreage useful for groundwater recharges?
- Aquifer recharge basin.
- Make groundwater recharge the best it can be in all Ventura River groundwater basins.
- Settlement/recharge/infiltration projects.
- Enhance groundwater recharge in Ojai Basin via Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency (OBGMA).
- Increase/optimize water storage in the watershed.
- Drill a horizontal well into Matilija dam.

- Removal of Matilija Dam - I think that it should be reconfigured as an above ground aquifer and be studied as such.
- Increase catching and holding water on our land.
- Create a 'Watershed Corps' to build 100,000 small \$1,000 projects to retrofit urban and agricultural lands to enhance water supplies and water quality and reduce flooding.
- Look at ways to expand the use of recycled water to reduce demands.

Plan/Collaborate Regionally

- Water management plan including groundwater management plan.
- Develop Groundwater Management Plan for main stem of Ventura River for diverters/pumpers (AG, Casitas, Water Companies, Ecology & Habitat).
- Set up a Joint Powers Authority for diverters/groundwater pumpers in main stem of Ventura River.
- Revise OBGMA with change in Golden State Water.
- Improve local cooperation and set our own allocations by forming a Water Users Association (Club) of pumpers/diverters in the Ventura River (Main stem) - include representation by water districts, City of Ventura, agriculture, and habitat. The Club can work on its own solution to a groundwater management plan (GWMP) and would be the local entity to deal with the Regional Board.

Improve Management Methods

- Reuse potable water, store in winter, create "swales" in agricultural land.
- Enhance rainwater capture opportunities.
- Control of invasives out of watercourse to increase water supply.
- Clear weeds, willows, and Arundo from all channels leading to better percolation into groundwater.

Healthy Ecosystem

Restore Habitat & Ecosystem Services

- Matilija dam removal.
- Remove Matilija dam ASAP.
- Take the dam down. Figure out how to make it happen.
- Notch it! (Matilija Dam).
- Matilija Dam removal.
- Removing the Matilija Dam.
- Focus on a reasonable incremental and economically feasible plan to remove the Matilija Dam.
- Assist fish passage conditions by maintaining selected pools.
- Increase native plants and natural functions in creeks and river, reach by reach.
- Remove invasive species/restore native habitats.
- Invasive species eradication projects.
- Grants to remove Arundo from watershed.
- Fund Crew more for Arundo removal.
- Use goats to eat Arundo and other invasive plant species. Prepare study to cover potential impact from goat waste vs. use of pesticides. Plant identification training to goat handlers to avoid goats ingesting native species.
- Improve ecosystem.
- Restoring the Ventura River - the lower portion.

Acquire Land & Easements

- Work with Ojai Valley Land Conservancy to obtain and maintain the best examples of ecosystems to be preserved for the public use for passive recreation while preserving habitat value.

Plan/Collaborate Regionally

- Remove ability for homeless to illegally live in the riverbed. Remove Arundo removes the ability to build Arundo structures that give privacy. Also getting public eyes through parkway public access, also make river less desirable for illegal encampments.
- Better alternatives for the homeless.
- Find the Homeless a better place than the river bottom.

Improve Management Methods

- Transition to organic methods for healthy ecosystems. Funding available through NRCS to transition.
- Transition to organics in agriculture and landscaping/gardening. Discontinue use of Roundup on Arundo and other so-called non-natives. Use of manual labor in mechanical techniques.

Coordinated Watershed Planning & Education

- Continue and expand on work of Council.
- Continue developing multi-benefit, integrated projects with multiple collaborators.
- Keep a watershed coordinator in place to keep process moving forward.
- Establish a long-term watershed coordinator position.
- Ensure that Council membership includes all stakeholders affected by watershed plans.
- Be proactive with Ventura River solutions.
- Integrated water management on multiple scales.
- Merge the many water providers/ districts into a Joint Agency to better coordinate and manage both groundwater and recreation –to avoid duplication of effort and improve parkway and river access and recreation programs with land conservancies, cities and County of Ventura.
- Include CERT, Cities, County, US Forest Service, water providers in planning and prep.
- Distribute plan to stakeholders/water providers.
- Organize watershed agencies and stakeholders.
- Coordinate emergency preparedness and response for flood, earthquake and fire.
- Self-regulating community groups.
- Maintain a balanced approach to water management. Be realistic about how things have changed in the last 100 years.
- The group should focus on what is right in the watershed and not be lead by unreasonable, new regulations.
- There needs to be an open space or vegetation management plan within the overall plan.

Watershed Education

- Watershed education programs in schools and churches.
- Watershed signage.
- Increase education/outreach regarding watershed issues.
- Environmental center/education program for kids and adults.
- Implement Ocean Friendly Gardens water conservation methods - native planting, greywater use.
- Educate on local hydrology. How does Ventura River act?
- Signs leading to the existing bike path and river access.
- Integrate watershed education and student involvement into the schools within the watershed.
- Keep community informed and upcoming requirements.
- Promote understanding of historical watershed management planning/progress to date.
- Watershed education in community schools and for adults thru Watershed U workshops.
- Watershed, river and creek signage.
- Support for developing Ventura River Parkways/Nature Center/OVLC Watershed Ed Steelhead Preserve.
- Education and outreach.
- Education & outreach to public about water use and watershed.

- Watershed, river and creek signage and educating the religious community.
- Have Council reach out to local chambers of commerce and/or civic groups such as Rotary, Optimists and make educational presentations.
- The general public and especially children need to be educated about the watershed and invited to experience it and participate in its preservation.
- Get everyone involved/engaged in long-term protection to assure success.
- Massive education for alternatives to pesticides, xeriscaping, saving water-seriously. Use of compost toilets-we poop in pure, beautiful water (that's nuts). Local laws passed to make all this mandatory.
- Increase public awareness of the challenges and delights of our watershed.
- Education and outreach to public about water use and watershed.

Amend or Enforce Policies and Regulations/Involve Regulators

- Coordinate/reduce permit requirements.
- Develop a watershed plan that will be incorporated into County and Cities' planning documents as a guide to keep all parties working toward identified goals. Incorporate Ventura River Parkway Plan into the Watershed Plan.

Develop Funding

- Find creative funding mechanisms to finance projects.
- Seek grant funding to support our efforts.

Land and Resource Management

Educate/Motivate

Promote better ranch land and water evaluation/ land management techniques.

Amend or Enforce Policies and Regulations/Involve Regulators

- Work with local government to make changes that promote the goals of the watershed. Smart land use and resources.
- Get resource and regulatory agencies more involved and updated on our efforts.

Improve Management Methods

Sustainable Agriculture: Best practices; reduce use of pesticides; continue/expand water conservation efforts; eliminate runoff.

Plan and Collaborate Regionally

- Transition plan for agriculture [if ag dies out in watershed].
- Bring in the Ventura County Fire Department to be an active partner in vegetation management.

Support Local Economies

- Create local jobs fixing problems.
- Include economically reasonable solutions. Human use of water is important - especially agriculture.
- Develop economic model to redirect resources.
- Need to integrate economics of the community into watershed plans, e.g. impacts on development, employment. Ability of Council to incorporate all relevant components, e.g. no reference to this in your plan.

Flood Management

- Address flood risks to protect life and property.

Acquire Land & Easements

- Preservation of floodplains for more natural flood protection.
- Preservation of floodplain areas along major watercourses.

Amend or Enforce Policies and Regulations/Involve Regulators

- Bring DFG into flood control issues - their permitting process is really dangerous. Can they be changed?
- Inappropriate building in floodplain: County and cities refuse to permit building in dangerous and inappropriate locations which impact the river and cost taxpayer money to recover from flooding disaster.
- Don't allow development in the floodplain.
- Clean out streambed/back to its original depth of 15' below river crossing. What can be done regarding property owners (next to stream) who illegally store commercial equipment and debris from their business, which creates potential for damming the creek and causing flood problems for other residences? How can we get a grant for a bridge across the Camp Chaffee Road and Coyote Creek bed graded down to a level that will protect the people adjacent to the creek from flooding?

Improve Infrastructure

- Survey existing drainage structures and watershed to improve/replace/upgrade or install new structures.
- Create a 'Watershed Corps' to build 100,000 small \$1,000 projects to retrofit urban and agricultural lands to enhance water supplies and water quality and reduce flooding.
- Study watershed and identify inadequate structures/repair and replace.

Clean Water

Educate/Motivate

- Promote infiltration of stormwater.
- Teach all to clean up (after) their own pet.

Study

- Identify pollution sources; develop local programs to reduce pollution.
- Study of sources of nitrogen and input to river.
- Study of pesticides and herbicides within watershed.

Improve Management Methods

- Safer water sanitizing methods.
- Questions - driven data collection. Make water testing a community resource.
- Survey waterways for trash and cleanup. May require volunteers or/and grants.
- Reduce pollution to rivers & streams.

Improve Infrastructure

- Use bio-digester or composting program for use of green waste/manures.
- Water Quality: expand use of bioswales to capture runoff and allow it to percolate.
- Create a 'Watershed Corps' to build 100,000 small \$1,000 projects to retrofit urban and agricultural lands to enhance water supplies and water quality and reduce flooding.
- Presently working on a system to clean up the rivers, the air and the land. The most effective being the biodigester to convert organic wastes into energy, fertilizer and compost.

Amend or Enforce Policies and Regulations/Involve Regulators

- Ban Roundup use on lawns etc.
- Encourage work with existing regulatory agencies to do better enforcement on land use issues that result in pollution with the watershed.
- Work for practical TMDLs for trash and nutrients, and help with implementation.

Access to Nature

- Enhance access and recreation through River Parkway.
- Coordinate public recreation and outreach events.

- Provide more public access to river area.
- Encouraging recreational use of the watershed.

Amend or Enforce Policies and Regulations/Involve Regulators

Implement/incorporate Ventura River Parkway Plan into watershed planning; adopt into all local plans.

Develop Funding/Support Local Economies

Use implementation of Ventura River Parkway to get funding for improvements (recreational, environmental and infrastructure upgrades). Parkway is an umbrella project across many jurisdictions.

Improve Infrastructure

- Improve trails and provide access to river for schools/classroom learning.
- A walking/nature trail along San Antonio Creek.

Biggest Concerns

Sufficient Water Supply/Balancing Supply with Competing Demands

- Lack of water for all users.
- Water conservation
- Is there enough water - will there continue to be?
- Balancing water supply with demand. Sustaining water levels with the pressures on the watershed.
- Given our watershed is finite, I'm concerned about the expansion I see of citrus groves and other agriculture. The river is depleted significantly when irrigation occurs.
- Environmental goals will take priority over the needs of the 42,500 people and 6,000 acres of agriculture.
- Balancing variable water supply with demands for healthy ecosystem.
- Water conservation! What is our supply what we have left?
- Water use and supply for both people and wildlife.
- Forced water right allocations in the main system of the Ventura River by outside agencies.
- Lack of water.
- Water from Ventura Watershed being used outside of Casitas District.
- Making sure there is water enough for people, business, farmers, and the Ventura River habitat.
- Sufficient water supply to meet the conflicting demands in our watershed.
- Protecting water supply for ecosystems and people.
- Water supply
- Balancing needs of all water users during a drought.
- Overuse of our water supply.
- Supplying water to coastal area that has no watershed into Ventura River.
- Water use and supply for people and wildlife.
- Education and outreach.
- Water conservation.
- Maintain independence from state water - self sufficient.
- Water supply.
- Balancing environment with human demands.
- Maintaining our independence from State water.
- Water conservation.
- Water supply; reuse; greywater.
- Loss of Ojai aquifer and the drought.
- Drought
- Drought

- Drought
- Adequate water supply for environment and people
- Water supply - threats and opportunities.
- Waste of water.
- [Need to] balance variable water supply with water demands for ecology, AG, people
- That we bicker our future away and don't take local action on planning water allocations in the main stem of the Ventura River. Forced water rights or allocations from State/Federal Agencies mean loss of local control and will surely bring lawsuits and neighbor against neighbor feuds.

Clean Water/Toxicity

- Pesticides/herbicides in the water.
- Protecting water quality for ecosystems and people.
- Water quality.
- Chemical trails, toxic waste & pesticides going into Ventura River.
- Animal waste (from ranches & stables) going into Ventura River.
- Poor or unknown water quality in the estuary.
- Nitrogen inputs to watershed.
- Pesticide/herbicide use.
- Equestrian facilities and horse waste in the watershed.
- Water quality - good data needed, water quality important, needs to be programmed on good data.
- Septic tank system infiltration.
- Pesticides/herbicides use and effect on children and the whole ecosystem.
- Chloramines and other chemicals added to water supply.
- Water quality, reducing runoff.
- TMDL control
- Roundup??
- Health of water basin recharge source - San Antonio Creek, Reeves Creek, Thatcher Creek, etc.
- Improve river water quality
- Better control needed of land use that results in contaminants entering surface and groundwater.
- Maintaining water quality.
- Trash within watershed is waterways/channels/creeks (including asphalt or appliances).
- Pollution and poisoning of our water and land by pesticides used by big ag, County, Land Conservancy, etc. Also toxic chemicals from oil industry and other industries.

Flood Management

- Coyote Creek.
- Flood control
- Flood protection - levee certification of existing levees with FEMA.
- Deteriorating infrastructure (drainage).
- Clearance of streams - *why doesn't watershed protection do this? Look at Thatcher Creeks and Reeves Creek - where will the flood water go?*
- Difficulty clearing streams of obstructive plants and trees that create flooding hazards.
- Addressing floods.
- Inappropriate building in floodplain.
- Failure of upstream property owners to maintain stream channels create downstream flood problems.
- Keeping development (which restricts river function) out of the flood plain.
- Aging infrastructure (drainage - not sure about supply) - limit property loss and flooding.

Permits/Regulations are Excessive, Ineffective, Expensive or Create Hazards

- Difficulty in getting permits to clear weed and debris from drainage systems for private property owners.
- That regulations being crafted by the Regional Water Board will cause irreparable harm to agricultural producers in the watershed for unknown and/or limited environmental gain.
- More government regulation - such as meters.
- Regulatory issues.
- MS4 regulations.
- Difficulty that private property owners have in getting numerous permits to manage drainage channels.
- Regulations are written that are unachievable.
- Monitoring costs are high with new regulations and are not flexible enough.
- This watershed is in good shape and yet it is facing extreme regulations.
- Regulatory involvement - too much may hurt property use/values.

Healthy Ecosystems

- Arundo and invasive species abatement.
- Control of invasive species such as Arundo.
- Keeping Arundo/invasive species out of river (healthy ecosystems).
- I'd like to get the damn dam gone.
- Stop study of Matilija Dam and get it out of there.
- Removal of Matilija Dam.
- Matilija Dam.
- Pesticides/herbicides use and effect on children and the whole ecosystem.
- Environmental quality - maintain or improve habitat/water quality.
- Improving river and riverside ecosystems.
- Provision of adequate surface water to preserve, maintain and enhance wildlife value.

Climate Change

Watershed resilience to climate change.

Land and Resource Management

Need to Manage/Protect our Watershed's Character

- Preserving the Valley for the benefit of all residents, people, livestock and wild animals.
- General preservation of watershed values into the future.
- Maintaining beauty and natural character and habitat/environment in watershed.
- Preserving existing character of the watershed.
- General preservation of watershed values (e.g. ecosystems etc.).
- Watershed resilience to population growth.

Need to Keep our Agricultural Industry Viable

- Ag viability.
- Agriculture is getting a bad rap in the area when it is not deserved.
- Agricultural viability and preservation.
- Value of agriculture (citrus and grazing).
- Sustainable agriculture in the watershed; awareness that other uses may not be as desirable; continue/improve best practices.
- Agriculture dies out in the watershed.
- The goals of the watershed do not adequately represent a vital economy or support agriculture.
- There seems to be an illogical fear of the safe use of pesticides in agriculture.

Need to Address Economic Issues

- Economics of various solutions.
- Lack of funding to implement good ideas/projects.
- Funding - misallocation to ineffective projects results in lack of funding for solutions.

Access to the River/Recreation

- Recreational access to the Ventura River.
- Recreational access.
- Public access to river.
- Recreational access to river, habitat restoration.
- Public access to river for recreation and education.

Coordinated Watershed Planning & Education

- Growing polarization of stakeholders e.g. agriculture/land owners and environmental groups.
- Water management.
- Getting diverse interests to work together - farmers, residents, city government, industry.
- Coordination between agencies, Ag. And environmental groups to actually accomplish good things.
- The urgent takes priority over the important.
- Conflicted objectives
- Organization of watershed agencies, stakeholders

Watershed Literacy

- Watershed literacy.
- Potential lack of interest on the part of residents and others living/working in watershed.
- Addressing fires.
- Ignorance and selfishness will stifle progress.

Questions

- Have other area or state watershed plans successfully completed groundwater management plans?
- Are there any lessons we can learn from work done in the other Ventura County watersheds that will help us with the Ventura River Watershed Plan?
- From listening here: How can we simplify permitting for constructive, habitat improvement work in the watershed?
- Have we identified a list of best funding sources to assist in achieving projects which will be part of the watershed plan?
- When will the plan be completed?
- What is the impact of the marijuana growers in the Los Padres? The effects on water supply and quantity?
- How are Council members appointed or elected?
- What is the projection for population growth in the Ventura River Watershed?

Notice of the Public Scoping Meeting was conducted through a number of methods, including the following:

- Email meeting notices to Watershed Council participants (275)
- Email meeting notices to Watershed U participants (55)
- Letters to residents/landowners (330) with property near the Ventura River and tributaries
- Email messages to Ojai Valley Land Conservancy members (1500)

- Email messages from other groups including Friends of the Ventura River, Ojai Valley Green Coalition and Association of Water Agencies, Ventura County
- Paper announcements in Ojai Valley News, Ventura Reporter and Ventura County Star
- On-line announcements in Ojai Valley News, Ventura County Star
- Radio announcement on KCLU News