

NEWS CLIPS

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Resource Conservation and Public Outreach

Organized by date

County agency's sewage-fertilizer partner files suit

BY ABBY SEWELL
LA Times 8/26/2016

More than a decade ago, Los Angeles County sanitation officials made a deal with a Central Valley farmer that seemed to solve an intractable problem for both sides.

The 11 wastewater treatment plants operated by the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County were producing nearly half a million tons a year of treated sewage sludge from human waste, and it had to be disposed of somehow.

Meanwhile, Westlake Farms, a large agricultural operation near Kettleman City in Kings County, was struggling financially and with poor soil.

They entered into a deal to build a composting plant on the farmland, where the biosolids would be mixed with wood chips and other green waste to turn the sludge into fertilizer that would meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency safety standards.

The fertilizer would be used by the farm to grow crops such as cotton, wheat and alfalfa.

The sanitation districts — which manage wastewater and solid waste for 78 cities in Los Angeles County, not including the city of Los Angeles — spent \$130 million to buy the land and build the plant, which finally opened this year. But after the lengthy delays, it is producing a fraction of the compost that had been projected. Now the sanitation districts are embroiled in a legal fight with the farmer.

“I think we were seriously misled along the whole project,” Westlake Farms President Ceil Howe Jr. said in an interview.

Howe sold 14,500 acres of the 54,000-acre farm to the sanitation districts in 2001 for \$27.4 million. The districts would use 2,500 acres for the plant, wetlands and evaporation ponds; and the farm would lease back the remaining land and grow crops there using the compost.

Howe said he had been expecting that the plant — which was designed to process up to 500,000 tons of biosolids and 400,000 tons of green waste a year — would provide enough compost for the entire farming operation, saving him as much as \$1 million a year on fertilizer.

Instead, the plant started this year with plans to process only 40,000 to 60,000 tons of human waste, and it's unclear whether it ever will reach full capacity.

Howe is now suing to have the sale undone, saying the sanitation districts have not lived up to their part of the deal.

Howe's attorney, James Ardaiz, called the plant a bad financial deal both for the farmer — who has been paying \$300,000 a year in rent on the 12,000 acres he leased back — and for the taxpayers of Los Angeles County.

“From L.A.’s standpoint, it’s just a \$130-million white elephant sitting out in the middle of nowhere,” he said.

Sanitation districts officials pointed out that their agreement with the farm did not guarantee Westlake a set amount of fertilizer from the plant on any specific time-line. They defended the money spent on the facility as necessary to ensure the agency will have a way to dispose of biosolids in the future.

“We view this facility as an important investment in long-term, reliable infrastructure that is critical to our ability to provide our vital wastewater treatment services,” said Ann Heil, section head of reuse and compliance for the districts.

The districts currently send some of the biosolids produced in Los Angeles County to a landfill in Kern County and some to Arizona, where the matter can be spread directly on farmland, Heil said.

The majority goes to five composting plants, including the newly completed Tulare Lake Composting Facility on the Westlake Farms site, which is the only one fully owned and operated by the districts.

She said that when sanitation districts officials first started talks with Westlake Farms, they were concerned that a number of counties were banning the application of biosolids directly on land and were looking for a “backstop or fail-safe.” Originally, the biosolids were to be spread directly on the farm, but when Kings County banned the practice, they turned to the idea of building a composting plant.

Heil said the districts will analyze the economics of the facility after the first year of small-scale operation and then will decide whether to increase production.

“Like any project, you like to start small when you’re first starting it up,” she said. “Right now, we’re still in the ramping-up stage.”

People who live near the plant have expressed mixed feelings about it.

Some local farmers initially welcomed it as a boon to the economy and a potential outlet for their own green waste. The plant has taken wood chips from Central Valley operations since starting up, and Heil said the operators plan to continue to do so.

But environmental groups concerned about air and water pollution sued to stop the project after it was approved by Kings County in 2004.

They settled two years later, with the sanitation districts agreeing to use clean-fuel trucks for hauling the waste. If the plant were operating at full capacity, it would take 55 truck trips a day — or more than 20,000 a year — to haul the waste there.

Maricela Mares-Alatorre, a Kettleman City resident and community organizer who opposed the project from the beginning, said she's still not sold on it.

“It seemed like another deal where the Central Valley gets shafted by Southern California,” she said. “We send them good water to drink, and they send us back their poo.... I can't say I'll be really upset if they're not operating at 100%.” abby.sewell@latimes.com Twitter: [@sewella](https://twitter.com/@sewella)

Candidate for water board

I want to put my local water board experience to work so that we will have a reliable water supply for tomorrow as well as today. That is why I am running for the seat on the Calleguas Municipal Water District board that represents most of the Conejo Valley.

Now is the time to make decisions on how to stretch our water supply, and Calleguas MWD is the agency to do it.

Calleguas is the water wholesaler for over 600,000 of us that live in southeast Ventura County, supplying imported water to all the local retail agencies.

So Calleguas can do big projects like building an ocean desalination plant to provide for us all, or look for additional sources of imported water besides the Sacramento Delta. I want Calleguas to seriously consider both options.

I have served for 10 years as an elected board member of Triunfo Sanitation District, which owns Oak Park Water Service.

Along with serving as chairman when we were building a large water tank, I have also championed increasing the use of recycled water for irrigation to lessen the need for imported water, which we are doing.

I also strongly believe in taking part in a dialogue with community members and have a Facebook page, "Let's Talk Water," to do that. For more information, go to my website, www.VoteForJanna.com.

Please vote for me in November to be your voice on the Calleguas board to ensure we have water for today and tomorrow.

Janna Orkney
Oak Park

Warmth reigns

With water temps still high, questions arise about forecast

By Cheri Carlson
Ventura County Star 8/25/2016

Warm water off the Southern California coast has made the unusual fairly routine over the past few years.

A tropical yellow-bellied sea snake wound up on Silver Strand Beach last fall. Sport fishermen found yellowtail and yellowfin tuna much closer to home. And hammerhead sharks were spotted off the Ventura coast.

But with the much talked about El Niño weather conditions in the rearview mirror, the warmer ocean water was expected to fade, too.

Has it? Not so much, said Nate Mantua, a research scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



A fisherman casts his line into the ocean just south of Mugu Rock. Warm ocean temperatures that were expected to fade after El Niño are instead staying around.

PHOTOS BY ROB VARELA/THE STAR



The wind catches Isabella Cabrera's boogie board as she plays in the water in Ventura.

Even as other spots have cooled off, Southern California has been a holdout.

Temperatures have stayed about 4 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the long-term average, Mantua said.

“While surface temperatures remain warmer than normal off the coast of Southern California, they are cooler than normal from Monterey north to Vancouver Island,” he said.

Sportfishing groups have noticed.

“This year has been a really good yellowtail season,” said Trey Campbell at Channel Islands Sportfishing.

That has been the case for the past couple of years, he said.

The warming conditions started building off Southern California in spring 2014 as wind patterns changed.

The unusually warm water — dubbed the warm blob — eventually stretched to more than 2,000 miles off Southern California and Baja all the way to Hawaii.

Then El Niño developed. While that would normally raise the ocean temperatures, the warming was already happening.

And now off Southern California, it has outlasted the El Niño, too.

Meanwhile, waters in the tropics have gotten colder than they have been for a few years, Mantua said, “but it isn’t yet what you would call La Niña.”

Generally, three-fourths of all El Niños are followed by strong La Niñas, said climatologist Bill Patzert at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena.

El Niño has more or less disappeared, he said.

“But we’re sort of having an El Niño hangover, because large areas of the Pacific are unusually warm,” he said. “La Niña is trying to break through a very soupy, warm Pacific.”

What’s the difference?

“Seven out of the last 10 La Niñas have been dry for California, especially Southern California,” Patzert said. “I like to call La Niña the diva of drought, or the dry sibling of El Niño, which was pretty dry by itself.”

Forecasters predicted a wet winter in 2015-16, but El Niño was a bust in Southern California with yet another year of belownormal rainfall.

Now, the area is in its fifth year of drought and facing possible dry La Niña conditions.

Experts say it’s too soon to say what winter will bring.

“The puny La Niña and presence of the warm water ups the odds, or gives me some hope, for a wet winter,” Patzert said.

“That would be a long shot,” he said.

“Of course, that would be the great irony: A dry El Niño and a wet La Niña.”



A sea anemone sits just below the surface of the water at the mouth of the Ventura River. ROB VARELA/THE STAR

VENTURA

Water charge called illegal

Lobby group for builders files complaint

By Arlene Martinez
Ventura County Star 8/25/2016

A construction lobbying group has filed a complaint against the city of Ventura over recently adopted water fees, claiming the charges do not match the actual cost of delivering the water and were illegally developed.

The Building Industry Association of Southern California and its nonprofit legal arm want the courts to invalidate an ordinance the City Council approved in June. The complaint was filed last week in Ventura County Superior Court.

The ordinance, which applies to all types of projects, requires developers to pay the city a one-time fee of \$26,457 per acre-foot of new water they use. It gives credits if a project brings water rights or incorporates 'extraordinary conservation' methods.

The fee is too high, the complaint claims, and overstates how much water a new unit of development will use.

The fee includes money to help the city create a 20 percent buffer 'to ensure that water demands could still be met without the need for mandatory conservation in the event of future droughts or other water shortage emergencies,' according to the ordinance. But the costs of creating the buffer are 'not reasonably related to the impacts of new development,' the complaint states.

Among other things, the claim calls the fee a 'tax' and says the city failed to demonstrate a relationship between it and the cost of the water.

"Really what it comes down to is: We think the program the city set up is not necessary and not fair and illegal," said Tim Piasky, executive officer for the Los Angeles/Ventura chapter of the association. "We came to them with alternative solutions that were fair and equitable, and there was no movement by the city, and it left us no option but to initiate legal action with the city."

While developing the fee, the city's Water Commission met eight times in public over more than nine months. The Building Industry Association got involved late in the process, submitting comments and looking to negotiate, City Manager Mark Watkins said.

"We'd been through a very open process over a long period of time," Watkins said. "It's frustrating when they come in at the very end."

Piasky said the association had reached out numerous times to the city as the ordinance was developed.

The city is still digesting the complaint, but water officials and members of the commission previously have said the fee is fair and necessary because it asks developers, along with city water customers, to pay their share of developing new water sources and helping maintain and improve water infrastructure.

Piasky said the association wasn't necessarily opposed to a fee so long as it was necessary and developed legally. So far, no developer has paid the fee, city officials said.

Read the full complaint at <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3034126/BIA-Complaint.pdf>

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Mark Watkins,

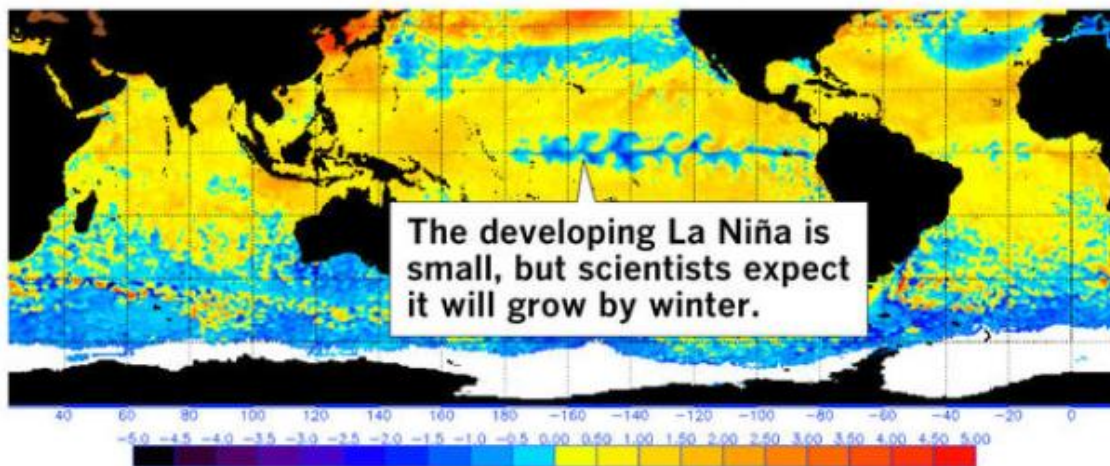
Ventura city manager

California's ocean waters due for a cooling trend after period of damaging heat, scientists say

Joshua Emerson Smith
LA Times 8/25/2016

Scientists hope La Niña cools ocean temperature

The cooling trend known as La Niña is manifested in a band of warm water in the Eastern Pacific along a narrow stretch of the Equator.



Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

@latimesgraphics

La Niña developing (@latimesgraphics)

As a series of marine heat waves linked to climate change has thrown ocean ecosystems out of whack from Australia to the coast of California, a cooling trend called La Niña has given scientists hope that water temperatures could come back into balance.

But so far, the cooling weather pattern — predicted to follow as a result of last winter's El Niño — remains squeezed by warmer ocean temperatures along a narrow stretch of the Earth's equator.

That might be good news for California's marine life, if not the drought. Winters, when the state usually has its best chance for substantial rain and snowfall, are often bone-dry during La Niñas. However, the cooling ocean waters also usually boost nutrient-rich conditions that can help sea life that has been suffering of late, including the kelp forests along San Diego County coast.

“La Niña is embedded in this pool of really warm water in the eastern, tropical Pacific,” said Art Miller, head of the ocean and atmosphere section at UC San Diego's Scripps

Institution of Oceanography. “You can see the cooling right along the equator, but there are these vast spaces of really warm upper-ocean conditions that it’s trying to push its way through.”

La Niña conditions typically peak between December and February, at which point the ocean may have released a significant amount of heat into the atmosphere or redistributed the warmer water around the globe.

That’s hardly guaranteed for this coming winter. The planet is coming off of one of the strongest El Niño periods on record. While the ocean-warming event didn’t deliver the succession of powerful rain and snowstorms many predicted for Southern California, water temperatures in the Pacific are still elevated.

The higher ocean temperatures persist in large part because of a separate series of marine heat events starting in 2013 often referred to as “the blob.” These marine heat waves have been linked to global warming and are credited with wiping out large kelp forests in Australia.

“These are really strong anomalies,” Miller said. “They’re far larger and more persistent and spread out over larger areas than we think we’ve ever experienced.”

Kelp forests also have taken a hit up and down the Pacific coast of the United States. Those along Catalina Island off Los Angeles have suffered significant damage in recent years, allowing invasive seaweed species to move into the area.

“Catalina looks quite different than it did several years ago,” said Colleen Wisniewski, regional manager for the Reef Check Foundation. “Kelp prefers areas where it’s cooler and has that nutrient-rich cooler water that’s upwelling. With that warm water blob, that mixing wasn’t happening for the most part.”

Underwater forests in San Diego County have been stressed in recent months, too. “There’s zero kelp canopy, so no kelp is growing to the surface right now — at least from La Jolla to the [U.S.-Mexico] border, which is pretty bad because our kelp forests are usually pretty sturdy,” Wisniewski said.

At the same time, some scientists warn that a full-blown La Niña may not be what California needs. Seven out of the past 10 such events created dry conditions in the southern part of the state, said Bill Patzert, climatologist with NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

“El Niño was a dud for Southern California rainfall, so maybe a wannabe or puny La Niña could deliver a much needed wet winter,” he said. “If I sound desperate, I am. A sixth [consecutive] dry year would be punishing.”

Joshua Emerson Smith writes for the San Diego Union-Tribune.

Bridge's construction enters 2nd phase

Endangered trout's welfare is key concern

By Cheri Carlson
Ventura County Star 8/24/2016

Work has started on building a bridge at Leo Carrillo State Park, the second phase of a project designed to help an endangered fish.

The Arroyo Sequit Creek project at the campground and beach near the Ventura-Los Angeles county line will replace two older roads with higher, freestanding bridges.

Those higher bridges are expected to provide year-round access for vehicles, improve safety, and give endangered steelhead trout a route to and from the ocean.

'The idea is once water flows, the steelhead will then be able to go up Arroyo Sequit,' said Craig Sap, superintendent of California State Parks' Angeles District.

Steelhead once thrived in the area, but surveys over the past decade or so found just a few of the fish at Arroyo Sequit.

That's not surprising, considering the challenges, officials said.

Not only has there been little rain recently, but one of the concrete crossings stood 4 or 5 feet above the dry creek before work began. Just two decades earlier, the crossing was just a few inches above the creekbed.

'Unfortunately, what occurred was a lot of scouring of the soil below the crossing,' Sap said.

That created a sort of dam or wall, Sap said.

The project started last summer. Crews have removed two concrete crossings that cut through creek and added the first bridge at one spot.

Parks staff members and volunteers also added more than 2,000 native plants in the area.

The second phase of a project started this month, and plans call for installing a bridge over the creek at the crossing closest to Pacific Coast Highway.

During construction, pedestrians will still have a path to the ocean, but vehicle access and parking will be affected.

The contractor started excavating earlier this week. Footings will be put in next, and then a prefabricated bridge will be added.

During construction, vehicle access to the North Beach parking lot will not be available and day-use parking at the South Beach parking lot will be limited, officials said.

Pedestrian access to the beach and campsite reservations will not be affected.

Work hours will be 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday to Friday, except holidays.

SIMI VALLEY

55 cases of water donated to police

A business has donated 55 cases of bottled water to the Simi Valley Police Department, authorities said.

The Firehouse Subs in Simi Valley conducted a promotion in which customers who presented a full, unopened case of water got a free sandwich, police said.

As a result of that promotion, business owners Tom and Christy Douglass donated 55 cases of water, which will be used in support of the operations of the department, the agency said. Employees and customers helped load the water onto a department vehicle, police said.

The agency thanked the business and the public for the donations.

Ventura County Star 8/24/2016

Environmentalists to sue San Bernardino and Colton over the killing of threatened fish



Brian Wang, 20, left, Perry Lau, 21, and Parsa Saffarinia, 24, all students from UC Riverside, catch and rescue threatened Santa Ana suckers from receding waters of the Santa Ana River after a nearby water treatment plant halted its outflows for maintenance. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)

Louis Sahagun
LA Times 8/23/2016

A coalition of environmental groups Monday announced plans to sue a regional water treatment authority and the cities of San Bernardino and Colton over the repeated stranding and killing of Santa Ana suckers, a fish on the federal threatened species list.

Roughly once a month, a water treatment plant that is jointly owned by the cities halts its outflows, quickly reducing a drought-stricken stretch of the Santa Ana River to a ribbon of dry gravel and stranding thousands of suckers.

During some of these events, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees and volunteers [rush into the vanishing puddles](#) to rescue as many of the 4- to 6-inch fish as possible, placing them in buckets and ice chests filled with water.

A few hours later, treated water starts flowing into the river again and the crews return the fish to the stretch of critical habitat for the species that has lost more than 75% of the area where it historically lived.

The 60-day “notice of intent to sue” filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club and the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society alleges the cities and their

Regional Tertiary Treatment and Water Reclamation Authority allow the plant to kill suckers without a permit required by the Endangered Species Act.

“It is outrageous that the cities’ plant is allowed to get away with killing and injuring Santa Ana suckers,” Ilene Anderson, a biologist with the center, said. “So, once again we are having to take legal action to protect these fish from going extinct in their namesake river.”

In an earlier interview, Stacey Aldstadt, general manager of the San Bernardino Municipal Water District, said the treatment plant shuts down its outflows to conduct maintenance required by its operating permits.

Under federal restrictions, the city isn't allowed to turn off the water because doing so threatens the fish. At the same time, however, federal water law requires the city to perform the regular maintenance because it is the only way to keep the plant's discharge clean.



The problem was discovered in 2014, when a team of U.S. Geological Survey researchers reported seeing a large number of suckers floating belly up downstream in the Santa Ana River.

The plant's average outflows of treated water have been halted at least 60 times over the last two years, according to Regional Water Quality Control Board records.

There have been 140 confirmed sucker deaths since June 2014.

The Water Reclamation Authority said it plans to make improvements to the waste water treatment system that would reduce the frequency of shutdowns.

The suckers, which scientists know as *Catostomus santaanae*, were once abundant across Southern California. They have mottled gray backs and silver bellies, and have

large, thick lips and small mouths that vacuum or suck up algae and other organisms for food.

Today they are found in the headwaters of the San Gabriel River in Angeles National Forest, Big Tujunga Creek in the Los Angeles River Basin, portions of the Santa Ana River and parts of the Santa Clara River system in Los Angeles and Ventura counties.

California high court upholds ban on dredges to extract gold



Matt Lauer of Portage, Wis., works a suction dredge to hunt for gold in the Klamath River near Happy Camp, Calif., in 2009. (Jeff Barnard / Associated Press)

Associated Press
LA Times 8/23/2016

California's ban on the use of suction dredges to extract gold from rivers is legal and not overridden by a 19th century federal law that allows mining on federal land, the California Supreme Court ruled Monday.

The court's unanimous decision was a victory for environmentalists and a blow to miners, who argued that the ban essentially stopped gold mining because doing it by hand is labor-intensive and makes the enterprise unprofitable.

Environmentalists say suction dredge mining risks killing fish and stirring up toxic mercury.

The high court's ruling came in an appeal of a criminal case in which miner Brandon Rinehart was convicted of a misdemeanor for suction dredge mining without a permit in 2012 and sentenced to three years' probation.

Associate Justice Kathryn Werdegar, writing for the court, said the federal Mining Law of 1872 did not guarantee a right to mine free from regulation.

Instead, its goal was to protect miners' property rights involving the federal land to which they laid claim, she said.

"The mining laws were neither a guarantee that mining would prove feasible nor a grant of immunity against local regulation, but simply an assurance that the ultimate original landowner, the United States, would not interfere by asserting its own property rights," she wrote.

Rinehart's attorney, James Buchal, said the high court showed a "casual disregard" for federal law.

He said Rinehart would probably ask the court to review its ruling or appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Suction dredges are powerful underwater vacuums that suck up rocks, gravel and sand from riverbeds to filter out gold.

State officials argued their right to protect the environment was not preempted by federal mining law. Miners countered that the state failed to show suction dredge mining killed any fish.

The court's ruling came more than a century after the famous California gold rush that brought tens of thousands of miners to the state from around the country.

California has experienced a mini-gold rush of sorts in recent years, as low water levels caused by the drought have lured amateur prospectors to riverbed spots that have been out of reach for decades.

There are more than 20,000 mining claims on federal lands in California. Suction dredge mining largely occurs in mountain regions.

California passed a law last year that allows state officials to resume granting permits for suction dredge mining under certain conditions that include making sure the practice does not have any significant effect on fish and wildlife. The conditions have not yet been met, so no permits have been granted.

UPDATES:

2:40 p.m.: This article has been updated throughout with the California Supreme Court's ruling.

This article was originally published at 11:05 a.m.

Miniature horse gets large love

Couple teach clean water importance in Ethiopia

Man they trained hired by nonprofit

By Doug Thompson Special to The Star
Ventura County Star 8/23/2016



Eric Martinez, of Oxnard, takes his miniature horse, for a walk in the Oxnard Shores area Monday. PHOTOS BY ROB VARELA/THE STAR

Five years ago Bob and Cindy Zahner of Ventura taught an Ethiopian named Teshale how to spread the word about the importance of clean water and how it improves health. The Zahners were making their first trip to the African country as field trainers for Lifewater, a Christian nonprofit working to end the global water and sanitation crisis.

Bob, 62, and Cindy, 59, returned to the country this past June on what's called a 'vision trip' to see the progress that has been made and to collect feedback for Lifewater. They were thrilled to learn Teshale Asefa was hired by Lifewater and now has seven employees working for him in a district in Southern Ethiopia.

'We saw firsthand the results Lifewater is having,' said Bob, a petroleum engineer for DCOR LLC, an oil and gas company in Ventura. 'The people are very happy



Juju Felicetta, of Las Vegas, takes a picture of Martinez and his miniature horse as they take a walk.



LEFT: Martinez loads his miniature horse into his van after taking him for a walk.



ABOVE: Felicetta, pets the miniature horse.



Cindy Zahner of Ventura carries water for a family in a remote community in Ethiopia, followed by Douglas Headrick, a Lifewater International board member who also serves as general manager of San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District; Zahner's husband Bob; and Teshale Asefa, the Ethiopian man who now oversees all of the Lifewater's hygiene outreach in Ethiopia. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/ JEFF CRIDER

with the results and understand how much this is helping them.' Based in San Luis Obispo, Lifewater focuses all its efforts on the countries of Ethiopia, Uganda and Cambodia, teaching people how to make water safer by building latrines and tippy-taps, a simple gadget used to wash hands with running water.

'On the most recent trip we went into the hills of Ethiopia to a village where they've never seen white people,' said Cindy Zahner, who is now retired from her career as a dental office manager. 'It was six hours south of where we taught in 2011.

Teshale took what he learned and showed people the importance of keeping people and livestock separate, how to sterilize water by keeping it in clear plastic bottles in the sun and by drying eating dishes in racks.' Clean drinking water can mean life or death, a fact driven home by testimony from a man whom Teshale had trained in hygiene.

'Through an interpreter, the man in the village said, 'We don't waste our money taking our children to the hospital, now they are surviving,' Cindy Zahner said. 'He told me they can actually name their children now. For over a year they didn't name their children because they didn't live more than a year.' Conversation is about the only way knowledge is spread through Ethiopian villages. There are no newspapers, Internet or social media - primarily because there is no electricity.

'They don't have running water in most of these villages and have to walk for miles every day to get water,' Bob Zahner said. 'Lifewater helps put in wells and works with existing springs so water can be contained and not contaminated.' Bob Zahner first learned about Lifewater during a 2008 presentation at Bible Fellowship Church in Ventura. He took two training classes and later introduced Cindy to the program.

'Cindy and I were married in 2010, after both of our spouses died of cancer,' said Bob Zahner. 'When we started dating in 2009 I explained what Lifewater was, and she was also interested. We decided hygiene would be good classes we could teach and do together.' The pair went to Ethiopia in 2011, 2014 and this past June. They recently climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania as part of a fundraiser for Lifewater and were on the summit June 22 on Cindy's 59th birthday.

'From the very first day I got to Ethiopia I fell in love with the people,' said Bob Zahner, his voice catching with emotion. 'They are not looking for handouts. They just want the tools and knowledge to help themselves. It's a big commitment of time and expense for us, but I can't think of a better way to use my time and the funds I have available.' For more information, visit www.lifewater.org



One of the beneficiaries of Lifewater's safe water, sanitation and hygiene projects is 9-year-old Mako Burka, a third-grader who lives in Nensebo Hurobaro Kebele in Gare Kotohashawa, Ethiopia. Here she fills a water container with safe water from a well that was recently installed by Lifewater. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/JEFF CRIDER

Pulling ice plant pests

Removal will lead to bird habitat

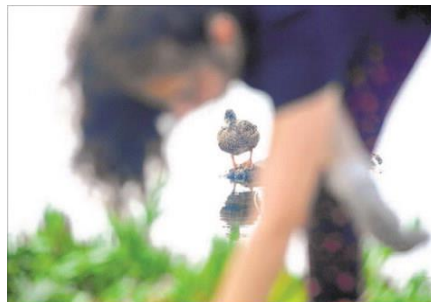
By Alicia Doyle Special to The Star
Ventura County Star 8/22/2016



Gladwyn French, of Ventura, helps remove ice plants during a volunteer effort led by Resource Conservation Partners at the Ventura Harbor Wetlands Ecological Reserve on Saturday. The nonnative plants prevent native plants in the area where the goal is to create a natural habitat for egrets, herons and other wildlife in the area. PHOTOS BY JOSEPH A. GARCIA/THE STAR

Volunteers removed nonnative ice plants from the ponds at the Ventura Harbor Wetlands Ecological Reserve on Saturday as part of a multiyear effort that will ultimately create a natural habitat for egrets, herons and other wildlife in the area.

“It grows like crazy,” said Sally Coleman, executive director of Resource Conservation Partners, a nonprofit corporation that forms partnerships within the region to help enhance and restore habitat. “Ice plant is super heavy and it sucks up the water, and we’re in a drought ... and because of how thick it is, no natives can get started



A female mallard duck watches as Sierra Futterman, of Ventura, works on removing ice plants Saturday. Birds are found at this location that are not seen elsewhere.

in here because they can't even find the ground.' The ice plant will take over the area and out compete everything else because it's more aggressive than some of the native plants, said Coleman, of Ventura.

'So we're not going to get native plants populating in here until we get this out of here,' she said.

After the removal of the ice plants, Coleman said Resource Conservation Partners 'want to put in about 50 native trees, like oaks and sycamores and cotton woods, and then we'll put in native bushes and shrubs. The vision is passive use. We just want it to be natural. We don't envision anything other than a couple benches and trails and native plants and trees.' The ponds off Spinnaker Drive in Ventura cover 50 acres - about half of which are covered with water and the other half filled with plants.

'This area is one of the very few perennial fresh water habitats for migratory birds,' said Noreen Murano, of Ventura, founder of Resource Conservation Partners. 'You're not going to get this fresh water anywhere else, because there's not that many areas like this.' Murano said it is a 'super critical area' because all of the reservoirs have no water. 'There are herons and egrets that are here all the time - the brown pelican is here there are so many bird species that depend on this water.' The ponds have existed since 1970, Murano said, and the low-maintenance ice plants were originally established as part of the landscape.

'It's a no-care plant that just spreads on its own,' Murano said. 'But if you compare what this provides in habitat value as opposed to native trees and shrubs, it doesn't provide the shelter, the food or the nesting areas, and the migratory birds depend on the habitat as they're crossing to nest in these areas.' Nearly 20 volunteers helped out with Saturday's effort, including John Connor, a board member with the Ventura Audubon Society.

'We're interested in getting involved in this project because this is a crucial area,' said Connor, of Ventura.

'The Ventura Audubon Society does this thing called a Christmas bird count, and this is nationwide,' Connor said. 'They pick a Saturday or Sunday in December or January and ... They go out and catalog the birds, and in this area we always find birds in this location that are not seen during the Christmas bird count in other parts of the county.' The removal of the nonnative plants and the planting of native plants are being done entirely by Resource Conservation Partners and through the efforts of volunteers, Coleman noted.

'To date, Resource Conservation Partners has received grant funding for this project from the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project, Patagonia and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,' Coleman said.

'The ultimate goal ... for this site is to make it a healthy environment for wildlife.' The next volunteer ice plant removal will take place Sept. 17. For more information call 8890529.



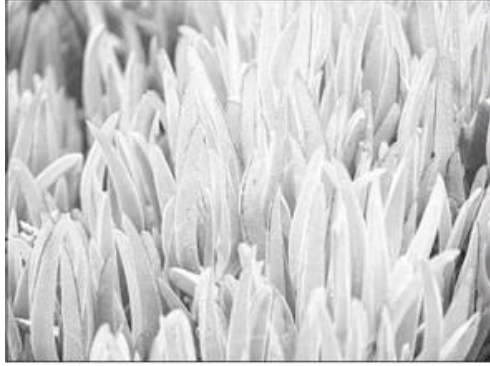
A group of mallard ducks swim in a man-made pond at the Ventura Harbor Wetlands Ecological Reserve on Saturday. Volunteers with Resource Conservation Partners helped in removing ice plants around the area. PHOTOS BY JOSEPH A. GARCIA/THE STAR



Volunteers with Resource Conservation Partners add to the load of ice plants that were already removed at the Ventura Harbor Wetlands Ecological Reserve on Saturday.



Nearly 20 volunteers helped out with Saturday's effort. The next volunteer ice plant removal will take place Sept. 17.



Volunteers with Resource Conservation Partners helped remove ice plant at the Ventura Harbor Wetlands Ecological Reserve on Saturday. The group was hoping to put in native plants and trees that the wildlife could use for food and shelter.

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