

Equity and Environment - Working to Achieve Results That Matter

By Ron Bottorff

Ventura County is known both for its cultural diversity as well as having some of the most valuable and threatened ecosystems in California. Lower-income communities are often especially affected by environmental problems related to clean air and clean water. All of us are affected by numerous issues involving climate change and the need to protect natural areas.

It is essential that the two Es involved in the above – Equity and Environment – cooperate more fully in understanding each other's priorities and in working jointly on projects important to both groups.

This article portrays two recent and ongoing efforts aimed at achieving results that demonstrate this type of cooperation.



Santa Paula's SESPEA Club Students Weigh In on 2015-2016 Natural Habitat Restoration Work Along the Santa Clara River

The 220-acre Hedrick Ranch Nature Area on the Santa Clara River near Santa Paula has been under the stewardship of Friends of the Santa Clara River since 2000 and has seen the restoration of over 50 acres of former farm lands to natural habitats. During the 2015-2016 season, Santa Paula High School's SESPEA Club (*Students Encouraging Social Political*

and Environmental Action) contributed mightily to this restoration and deserve special recognition for their outstanding efforts.

This was truly a cooperative undertaking. It was conceived and led by Nina Danza, Ventura Group Chairperson of the Sierra Club Los Padres Chapter, working with SESPEA leaders Mireille Vargas and Maria Elena Terrazas. Adam Lambert and Tom Dudley of the University of California Santa Barbara Marine Science Institute provided technical direction during the restoration.

In Nina's words: "After learning about damaged and dwindling riparian ecosystems on the Santa Clara River, the teens have made championing restoration of native plants a high priority. They have volunteered during rain, wind and heat. They have come out on Superbowl Sundays and the morning after the prom. They have planted hundreds of native plant starters in the ground and cared for hundreds more native seedlings in the site nursery. Hardest of all, they've whacked, yanked, and pulled out some of the meanest of invasive plants in the region."

In sum, their efforts, and those of others such as the Ventura Audubon Society, are paying off big-time. Over the years the biodiversity at the site has recovered remarkably, as shown by the fact that over 140 bird species now have been seen at the nature area, and many of these also nest on the site.

Integrated Regional Water Management Plan to Help Disadvantaged Communities

An effort is now underway under California's Proposition 1 to assist Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) with water supply or water quality needs. Ventura County has at least ten such communities, defined by the State of California as a community with an annual Median Household Income (MHI) that is less than 80% of the Statewide MHI. Many DACs are served by small systems and lack the capacity to effectively manage their water systems. Too often these are the only water delivery systems that serve these communities, and may violate State requirements for safe drinking water.

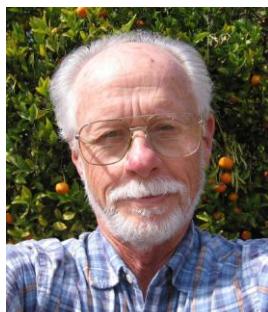


The Proposition 1 program is being carried out by the Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County under its Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Plan. Environmental groups including the Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy, and Friends of the Santa Clara River have supported this plan for more than a decade and now have the opportunity to assist in developing water-related projects in DACs. This program is a great opportunity for our region in addressing unmet water quality and water supply needs in our lower income communities.

An eligible DAC project needs to serve a "critical water supply or water quality need." Example projects may include: management of flood flows that threaten the habitability of dwellings; wastewater treatment necessary to abate or prevent surface or groundwater contamination; and replacement of failing septic systems with systems that provide for the long-term wastewater treatment needs of the community.

Our local IRWM group is currently cooperating with neighboring IRWMs in the Upper Santa Clara River and in Greater Los Angeles to identify ways of working together to obtain funding for area projects under the Proposition 1 grant program. There is a total of \$ 9.8 million allocated to our Funding Area, with no set formula for distribution of the funding among the IRWM Regions.

DAC projects can include environmental education and other activities that assist members of these communities. Grant managers and the environmental community must work to become fluent with the culture of disadvantaged communities, build trust and strengthen communication. Only in this way can the necessary cooperation be developed to properly address the needs of these communities.



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For more information
about the grant program
in our funding area, you can visit:

<http://www.ladpw.org/wmd/irwmp/index.cfm?fuseaction=prop1>