

WATERSHED

E-NEWS Winter 2013

FRIENDS OF THE SANTA CLARA RIVER

Friends of the Santa Clara River (FSCR) is a non-profit, public interest organization dedicated to the protection, enhancement and management of the resources of the Santa Clara River, which flows approximately 100 miles from Acton, California to the Pacific Ocean. The Santa Clara is the largest natural river system remaining in Southern California, and was selected by American Rivers in 2005 as one of the nation's most endangered rivers.

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Newhall Land Attempts to Remove Judge Who Ruled Against Newhall Ranch Approval



On October 15, 2012 Superior Court Judge Ann Jones confirmed a previous ruling that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (formerly Fish and Game) approvals for the enormous Newhall Ranch project in Los Angeles County violated state law in numerous ways. Now, Newhall's attorneys are attempting to have the judge removed from the case, claiming she is biased.

The original case was filed by several environmental groups, including FSCR, in January 2011, challenging the legitimacy of the permit to alter the Santa Clara River granted for Newhall Ranch by the Department.

Newhall claims, among other things, that Jones erred by not disclosing she had once opposed a neighbor's plan to divide some property and had worked with a member of the Sierra Club (an opponent of Newhall Ranch) in this matter.

Jones has been described by lawyers involved in past land-use battles as “tough”, “fair”, “thorough” and “very bright”. The legal community was reportedly incredulous at Newhall’s action, strongly questioning the concept of disqualifying judges based on unrelated personal legal matters. Even the Los Angeles Times weighed in, advising Newhall to back off. Stay tuned.

Large-Scale Riparian Restoration Proposed for the Santa Clara River

[Note: The following describes a riparian restoration project developed by Adam Lambert and Tom Dudley of UC Santa Barbara encompassing several areas along the Santa Clara River between Santa Paula Creek and Sespe Creek . It is anticipated that Friends of the Santa Clara River (FSCR) will actively participate in this effort, which will be carried out jointly between the University, The Nature Conservancy, and local government entities.]

Purpose and Need

The Santa Clara River Parkway Project, funded by the State Coastal Conservancy (see www.santaclarariverparkway.org) has identified the river reach between Santa Paula and Sespe Creeks as a critical wildlife zone due to its size, natural resources, and potential wildlife habitat. However, anthropogenic (human-induced) alterations over the years have led to habitat degradation and invasion by non-native species. *Arundo donax* (giant reed) is the primary invasive species of concern – it grows in large stands throughout the project area, may use as much as four times as much water as native vegetation and, although highly flammable, recovers rapidly from fire by re-growth from below-ground plant parts. By contrast, cottonwoods, willows, and other native woody plants are much less tolerant of direct exposure to fire. *Arundo* also provides little to no habitat for wildlife.

Removal and restoration activities over the past few years on 15 acres of arundo-infested habitat at the Hedrick Ranch Nature Area, which is under the stewardship of FSCR, have resulted in a significant increase in wildlife, especially the endangered least Bell’s vireo. Removing arundo and restoring native riparian forests will increase groundwater quantity and quality, enhance the wildlife value of associated wetlands, reduce flooding damage caused by accumulation of arundo biomass, and reduce wildfires, which have killed a substantial number of riparian-dependent trees in the project area. Replacing arundo with native plants will also provide natural filtration of agricultural and urban run-off from adjacent lands.

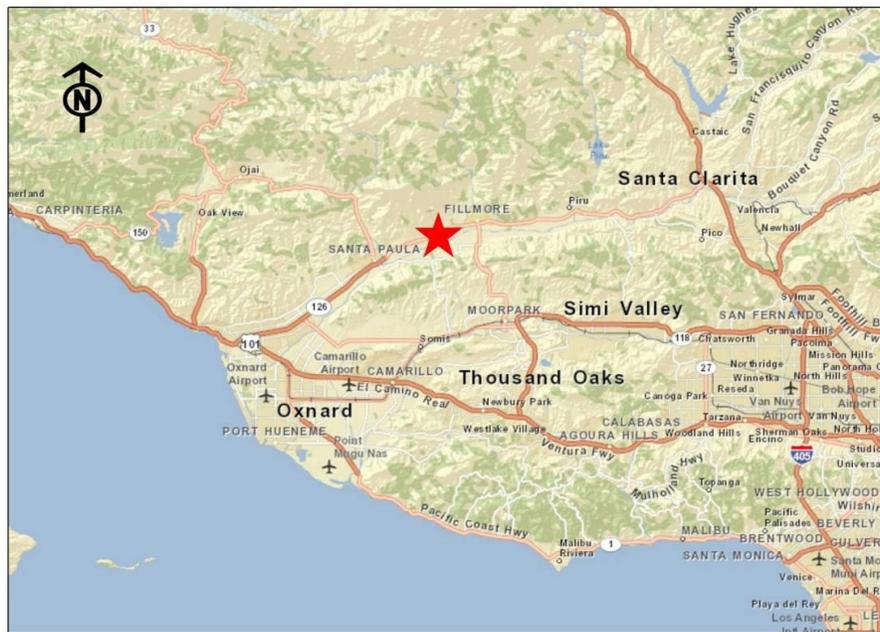
The proposed project is part of a large-scale effort to eliminate arundo from the Santa Clara River watershed and to improve water resources in the region. The California State Coastal Conservancy’s 2011 strategic plan for arundo treatment and post-treatment re-vegetation for the lower watershed will be used to guide project implementation.

Project Description

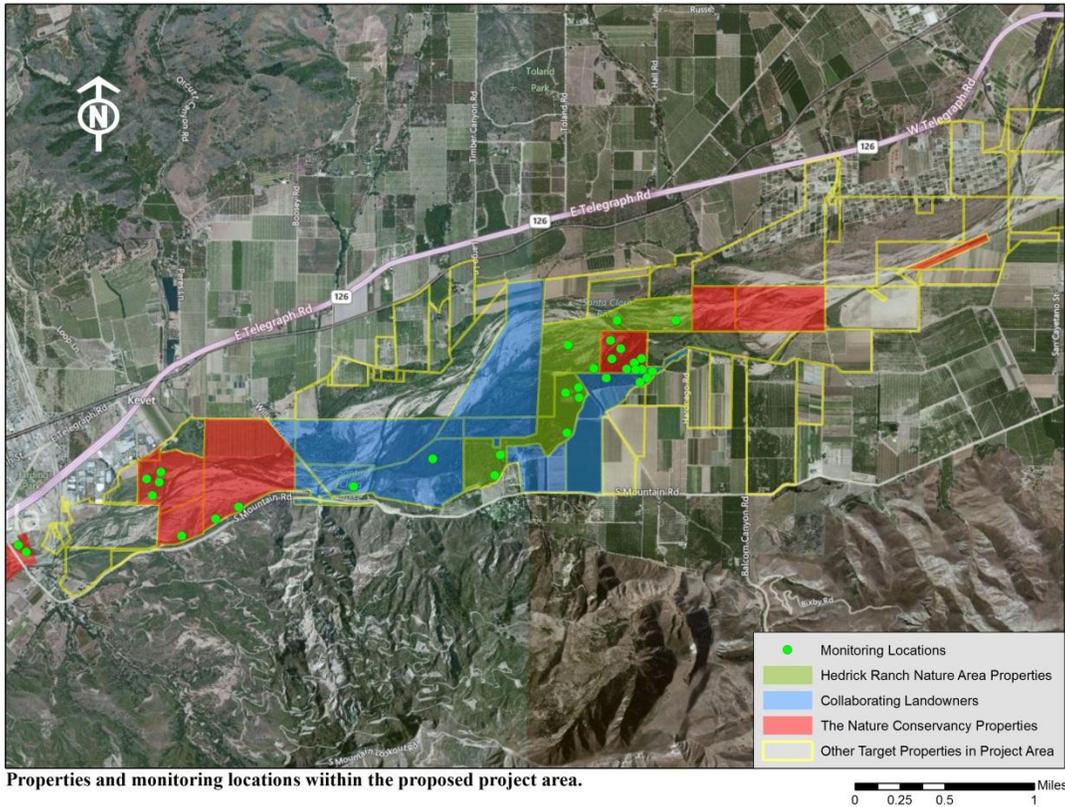
The overall project area (see maps below) covers over 1,000 acres, with a mix of degraded and restored properties within the floodplain. The goal is to create a large, contiguous riparian zone through a series of related, but stand-alone restoration projects. Currently, arundo has been removed from about 27 acres within the project area. Restoration work will begin on properties with the highest habitat value, largest arundo populations, and that pose the greatest risk to public safety (through floods and fires). Much of the land in this area is already owned by project partners, including The Nature Conservancy (411 acres), FSCR (220 acres), and several willing landowners.

Synergies and Linkages

The State Coastal Conservancy initiated the Santa Clara River Parkway Project in the late 1990s collaboration to acquire and restore floodplain lands for flood protection, wildlife habitat, and recreation. The Parkway project's ultimate goal is the acquisition and restoration of a 25 mile-long, or a 6,000-acre corridor, from the mouth of the Santa Clara River to the Sespe Creek confluence. The proposed project will restore a critical reach within this project area. Additional partners for the project include the Santa Clara River Trustee Council, Santa Clara River Watershed Conservancy, Watershed Coalition of Ventura County, Ventura County Watershed Protection District, Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner, Ventura County Weed Management area, and Santa Clara River Invasive Weed Task Force.



Location of the project area in Ventura County



Public Utilities Commission Complaint Filed over Newhall Water Company Acquisition

On January 4, 2013, SCOPE and FSCR joined forces to file a complaint before the California Public Utilities Commission. The action was brought to protest a sweetheart deal by Castaic Lake Water Agency (Castaic) to acquire Valencia Water Company, wholly owned subsidiary of Newhall Land and the water company that will supply Newhall Ranch. The \$73.8 million dollar deal between Newhall and Castaic would illegally commit future water supplies to the massive Newhall Ranch project in northern Los Angeles County. The fact that Newhall Land owns the water company that will serve the project has long cast doubt on the fairness of the water supply assessments. In fact, the approval of the Newhall Ranch Specific Plan was overturned by the Courts in 1999 in part based on inadequate water supply information. Now this proposed water company acquisition makes it even clearer that there are questions in this area, since Castaic must agree in advance to serve all of Newhall's projects.