

WATER WISE

OPENING STATEMENT

“Salts Threaten Water Supply in the Santa Clara River Watershed...a Collaborative Effort in Finding Solutions”

The chloride threat to beneficial uses in the Santa Clara River watershed has resulted in one of the most significant examples of strategic alliances and collaborative efforts in finding a solution for all of its stakeholders. The story begins with a finding by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board to adopt a more stringent Water Quality Objective for chloride in the upper Santa Clara River. Two wastewater treatment plants operated the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts were discharging in excess of 8,000 pounds of chloride annually into the upper Santa Clara River on an annual basis. The chloride was having a substantial impact upon salt-sensitive crops such as avocados, nursery stock and strawberries across the county line in Ventura.

In 2003, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board adopted a stringent Water Quality Objective of 100 mg/L for chloride discharged at the two wastewater treatment plants. It also developed, pursuant to negotiations with the Sanitation Districts, a Chloride Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Implementation Plan to assist the Board in developing a proper WQO for chloride. This Plan consisted of a number of projects to be implemented in phases under the Plan. The first aspect of the Plan involved Literature Review Evaluation of salt-sensitive crops. A second study involved the creation of a Groundwater Surface Water Interaction Model to estimate how chloride would move through the Santa Clara River. The last study undertook an evaluation of threatened and endangered species in the Santa Clara River.

Once these studies were completed, the next phase of the Plan involved the establishment of Site Specific Objectives and an Anti-Degradation Analysis.

The third aspect of the Implementation Plan involved the construction of two reverse osmosis facilities at the Valencia and Santa Clarita WRPs, as well as a 43-mile brineline through Ventura County to the Pacific Ocean.

Estimates on the total cost of this Implementation Plan were projected between \$300 to \$500 million to Santa Clarita Valley rate-payers.

The project was expected to take approximately 15 years, plus additional time if needed under the Plan. This time estimate does not consider delays resulting from third-party litigation!

In the meantime, chloride discharges in excess of 150 mg/L and higher, at times, were being discharged into the upper Santa Clara River making their way downstream degrading surface and groundwater and adversely impacting beneficial uses such as agriculture. At the time this was occurring, much of the attention County's agricultural industry was being devoted

to the Calleguas Water Management Plan. Many of us in agriculture believed that something was going on in Los Angeles County that affected agriculture in Ventura County, but it was not until certain individuals within the County avocado and strawberry industries raised a flag about the potential harm to salt-sensitive crops from the chloride effluent that the agricultural industry reacted.

The response was formation of the Ventura County Agricultural Water Quality Coalition to participate in this public process out of a concern for the downstream beneficial users of the River water. The Coalition consists of over 1,000 local farmers and major agricultural trade associations, the California Strawberry Commission, California Avocado Commission, the Association of Water Agencies, and the Ventura County Economic Development Association. The Coalition represents one of the broadest and diverse coalitions ever created in the history of Ventura County. Through its participation in the public chloride TMDL process, the Coalition obtained successful rulings from the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board and the State Water Resources Control Board, on limiting the timeline of the Chloride TMDL Implementation Plan and inclusion of benchmarks for time-certain treatment tasks for limiting the discharge of chloride into the River.

The Coalition provided a catalyst to the ongoing public process and has since become a major stakeholder in this process.

Most recently, the Coalition collaborated with the Sanitation Districts and United Water Conservation District to implement an Alternative Water Management Plan for the *entire* Santa Clara River watershed as an alternative solution to the Chloride TMDL Implementation Plan. This Alternative Plan could not have been accomplished without the leadership of the stakeholders to this process. Today, you will be educated on the specifics of this Alternative Water Management Plan from Mr. Phil Friess, Departmental Engineer, Technical Services, Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts, and from Dr. Steven Bachman, the Groundwater Program Manager for United Water Conservation Districts. Without the tireless efforts of these individuals, including other consultants and water professionals who have brought this Alternative Water Management Plan from a concept to a potential “win-win” solution for all of the stakeholders in this precious watershed, we would not be here today.

Indeed, following a recent presentation of the Alternative Water Management Plan to the Regional Board’s staff, it was opined that this collaborative effort should be a template for other groups throughout the State who are confronted with similar adversity. The Ventura County Agricultural Water Quality Coalition wishes to thank all of its participants and contributors, consultants, benefactors, and others who have supported, and continue to support its efforts in this important collaborative process to reduce chloride in the Santa Clara River and protect the beneficial uses.