



Santa Clara River
Steelhead Coalition

The WaterTalks Series is an ongoing program of educational events designed to provide people a place to learn about water-related topics. The program goal is to increase informed participation in water management policy decisions by providing a place for community members to interact with experts who have a diverse range of perspectives and to develop common understanding. Water Talks is a program of the Santa Clara Steelhead Coalition led by California Trout.

Stewardship of the Santa Clara River and its Steelhead

Dan Wilson, NOAA, Sophie Parker, The Nature Conservancy and Wilma Tichelaar National Resource Conservation Service



The Nature Conservancy Native Plant Restoration.
Photo: Nina Danza.

Freshwater and land stewardship results in sustainable biodiversity and livelihoods. Resilient ecosystem processes are supported when integrated and best land management strategies, tools and practices are employed. Innovative freshwater stewardship actions are in progress by organizations and programs at a global, federal, state and local level, namely the Wild Salmon Center's Strongholds and Wild Steelhead Sanctuaries initiatives, National Marine Fisheries Service's Safe Harbor agreements, and our local Santa Clara River Parkway.

In 2010 the Santa Clara River watershed was named the Southern steelhead stronghold for the southern California region, because it has the richest, strongest, and highest intrinsic potential to recover the species. Protection and stewardship is far more cost effective than restoration of degraded systems and these programs are a proactive and preemptive approach to freshwater and land stewardship.

The Santa Clara River Parkway is a project of the California State Coastal Conservancy, in collaboration with the Nature Conservancy's Santa Clara River & Coast Project, Friends of the Santa Clara River, private landowners and local governments, to acquire and restore floodplain land along the lower Santa Clara River for habitat, flood protection, and recreation.

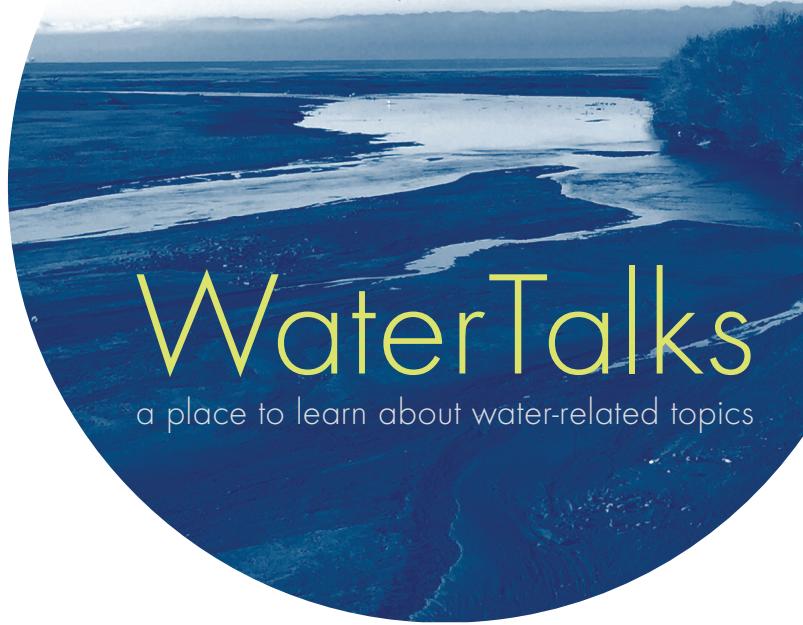
Hedrick Ranch Nature Area was the first property to be included in the Parkway and is a successful freshwater stewardship example in Ventura County.

Good stewardship actions include: designing road crossings that allow for fish passage, managing the removal of invasive non-native species from lands and riparian areas, water conservation in off stream storage to promote and/or maintain instream flow for fish, and employing best management practices to managing sediment and runoff.

Dan Wilson is a fisheries biologist stationed since 2009 at NOAA Fisheries in Santa Rosa, California, where he works with stakeholders in Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin Counties to advance recovery of chinook salmon, steelhead and coho salmon. Dan was the lead negotiator and author of the Dry Creek Valley Programmatic Safe Harbor Agreement. In his free time, Dan enjoys playing with his two daughters, running, bass fishing, and brewing beer.

Dr. Sophie Parker is a senior scientist with The Nature Conservancy tasked with overseeing habitat restoration and species recovery along the Santa Clara River, reducing impacts from renewable energy development in the desert through smarter siting, and forging new conservation strategies in urban Los Angeles. Prior to joining the Conservancy in 2008, she was a post-doctoral scholar at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Wilma Tichelaar is a Soil Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service who works with agricultural producers to address resource concerns on their properties through conservation planning. Wilma originally started working with NRCS in Michigan, and has now been working in Ventura county for 1 year.



The Wild Salmon Center

- Invests freshwater stewardship effort throughout the northern Pacific; from California up through Oregon and Washington, British Columbia and Alaska and across to Russia and Japan.
- The Wild Salmon Center is committed to wild salmon, because these are among the most adaptable creatures on the planet and are well equipped to survive ongoing industrial development, population increases, and climate change.
- The Wild Salmon Center prioritizes healthy river habitat because protecting is more cost effective than restoration.
- Their Salmon Stronghold Initiative names abundant and resilient populations of salmonids. The Santa Clara River was identified as a Wild Salmon Center Stronghold watershed in 2010, based on the number of wild spawning fish, the diversity of life histories, the influence of hatchery reared fish on their wild counterparts, climate change, and population resilience.

The Safe Harbor Agreement

- Under the Safe Harbor Agreement, NOAA Fisheries is able to provide incentives encouraging property owners to restore, enhance, or maintain habitat for species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- A safe harbor agreement assures landowners that additional land, water, and/or natural resource use restrictions will not be imposed as a result of their voluntary conservation actions to benefit covered species.
- The first-ever “Safe Harbor Agreement” occurred in northern California on March 3, 2016 between private landowners on the Russian River watershed and NOAA benefiting federally protected salmon and steelhead.

Santa Clara River Parkway

The primary goal of the Santa Clara River Parkway Project is the acquisition, conservation, and restoration of floodplain lands within the Santa Clara River corridor. Land acquisition is being conducted on a willing seller basis, with the initial focus of the project on the lower river. To date over 3,500 acres and nearly 18 miles of river corridor have been acquired, with plans to acquire and restore a 25 mile-long, or 6,000-acre, corridor from the mouth of the Santa Clara River to the Sespe Creek confluence.

The Coastal Conservancy has partnered with The Nature Conservancy's Santa Clara River & Coast Project to acquire, manage, and restore Parkway lands. The Parkway was established to achieve three goals:

- Conserve and restore aquatic and riparian habitat for native species, and the hydrologic and geomorphic processes that create and maintain those habitats;
- Provide enhanced flood protection for adjacent private land and public facilities;

- Provide public access and environmental education, including the creation of a continuous public trail system along the length of the Parkway.

Hedrick Ranch Nature Area

- HRNA is a flagship example of freshwater stewardship on the Santa Clara River. It anchors the future Santa Clara River Parkway and contains 220+ acres of riparian habitat near Santa Paula, CA
- Sanger ‘Sandy’ Hedrick steered the family goals for the land use from historical grazing and agriculture toward riparian restoration and species habitat, still maintaining farming practices on other parcels.
- Volunteers including local high school students, environmentalists and outdoor enthusiasts have participated for 15 years transforming the area into successful endangered species habitat and a living research lab, with a propagation nursery.

CalTrout and Coalition Projects

CalTrout secured a Proposition 84 Department of Water Resources Integrated Regional Water Management Grant via the Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County to remove 30-50 acres of invasive non-native species, arundo donax, on the lower Santa Clara River that is designated critical steelhead habitat. The eradication will expand and/or connect existing, ongoing or completed restoration, such as Hedrick Ranch Nature Area and The Nature Conservancy properties between Santa Paula and Fillmore. The project extends and expands good land stewardship practices to restore 30-50 acres of riparian habitat, and save 800 acre feet of water per year, supporting the larger contiguous freshwater corridor.

CalTrout has secured funding through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Santa Clara River Trustee Council, and State Coastal Conservancy, to design and construct streambed stabilization to restore fish passage at the Harvey Diversion on Santa Paula Creek reopening 12.3 mi of historically critical habitat for steelhead. This project resolves the current fish passage problem, informs a long term solution, and continues to deliver water to local farmers for irrigation of orchards.

Friends of the Santa Clara River secured a CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Fisheries Restoration Drought Program grant to develop an alternatives analysis and feasibility study to replace a complete fish passage barrier on Sisar Creek, a tributary of Santa Paula Creek. Supported by California Trout the team will pursue a fish passage solution (i.e., bridge) to 100% design and construction in subsequent phases.

Upcoming Water Talks

Invasion in my Backyard: Managing Pests & Weeds to Benefit Fish

May 25

Water Conservation & Fish Passage Design to Enhance Flow & Connectivity

June 29