

6th Annual

Top Achievements of the Environmental Community in Southern California



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Environment Now®

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Note from Environment Now's Executive Director

Environment Now is proud to present the 6th Annual *Top Achievements of the Environmental Community in Southern California (Top Achievements Report)*. The report highlights the successes of Southern California's nonprofit environmental organizations in 2009. We believe that closely examining the steps that led to success can enable activists to apply these models of change to future environmental challenges.

With the dual goals of creating an objective report and deepening the dialogue between public officials and the academic community, we enlisted distinguished experts in government and academia to serve as selection panelists. In each category, the panelists chose an achievement and a setback. In Land Use, Open Space, and Smart Growth, the panelists found that this year's setbacks far outweighed the achievement and chose to dedicate extra space to those setbacks.

We are pleased that Ken Cook, Co-founder of the Environmental Working Group, agreed to guest author a special section on how nonprofits can better utilize the changing media to achieve their goals.

We are certain you will find the stories highlighted in this year's *Top Achievements Report* as inspiring as we do.

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Environment Now is an activist nonprofit foundation created in Southern California by Frank and Luanne Wells in 1989. Our mission is to be an active leader in creating measurably effective programs to protect and restore California's environment.

In Appreciation

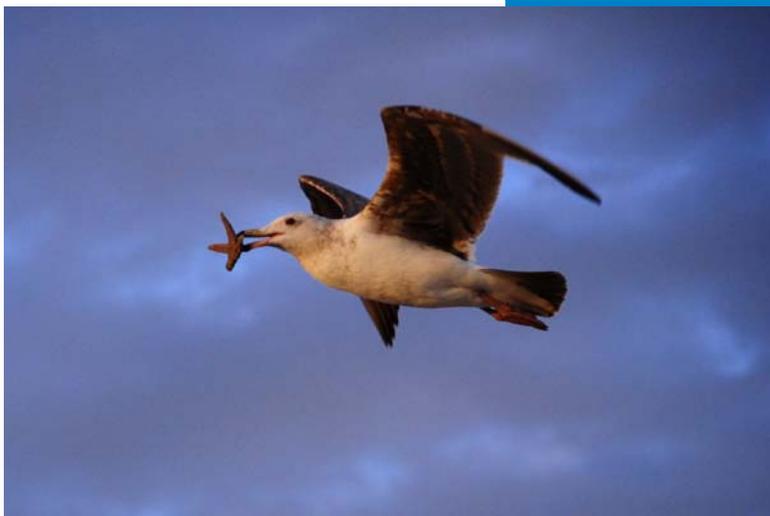
Environment Now sincerely thanks our distinguished selection panelists for providing their time and expertise to this report. We would also like to thank Ken Cook of the Environmental Working Group for highlighting how nonprofits can better utilize new media. Finally, Environment Now thanks The Better World Group for its vital contributions to every aspect of this report.

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Please [click here](#) to send your comments on this year's report.

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[Suzanne Masterson Photography](#)



Coastal Protection



Photo
Ventura County Coastline

Natural Approach Infiltrates Ventura County Stormwater Rules

Pollutants found in stormwater runoff include heavy metals, oil, grease, sediment, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, bacteria, and trash. Rain washes these pollutants from streets and storm drains directly into rivers and the ocean without treatment. In the past, municipalities have addressed this problem through public education, fixing drains, and other remedial measures. However, in 2009, Heal the Bay and the Natural Resources Defense Council convinced Ventura County to take one step closer to address the root of the problem.

The Achievement

[Heal the Bay](#) (HTB) and the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) (NRDC) successfully negotiated with representatives of 12 stakeholders to establish a groundbreaking, enforceable [Ventura County Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Permit](#). The permit was adopted by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board in May 2009. For new and redevelopment projects, the permit shifts attention away from traditional stormwater infrastructure and treatment devices and toward onsite features that replicate natural hydrology.

The permit is the first in California to include aggressive numeric [low-impact development](#) (LID) requirements. It represents a holistic approach to water management by requiring that stormwater not merely be treated, but instead

Coastal Protection Panel:

Esther Sanchez, J.D.
California Coastal Commission

Gail Osherenko, J.D.
Marine Science Institute,
University of California, Santa Barbara

be retained onsite through infiltration, evapotranspiration, or harvest and reuse. The permit also sets a precedent by including enforceable numeric targets and waste load allocations that will help Ventura County to meet federal standards for total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). Some previous permits included specific TMDLs, but this permit marks the first time that all TMDLs for an entire county can be enforced through one permit. Moreover, by including performance-based standards for best management practices, the permit will demand the use of the most effective stormwater cleanup techniques.

The 10-hour May meeting of the regional board, in which the permit was adopted, was difficult for all stakeholders. In the end, the board showed courage by going against the recommendation of its staff and adopting the language environmentalists and local governments had agreed upon. The permit commits cities and the county to adopt unprecedented levels of stormwater control.

What made the Difference?

“It took courage on the part of the environmental groups, public agencies, and the regional board to adopt the most stringent standards ever imposed on stormwater runoff,” noted Rick Cole, Ventura City Manager. “But it also took a dose of common sense to find a fair and cost-effective way of achieving clean water goals.” Commitment and timing were important in coming to an agreement, but cost was also a consideration. “HTB and NRDC were superb in their willingness to make sure they achieved their goals while recognizing the public’s concern for costs,” noted Mike Sedell, Simi Valley City Manager.

As dozens of federal TMDL deadlines loomed, attitudes at the regional board began to favor a stronger permit. After the first draft was released for comments in 2006, HTB and NRDC met with the Ventura County public works director and the city managers of Ventura, Simi Valley, and Oxnard. Everyone had a common goal: clean water. How to get there was the subject of negotiations. The stakeholders held regular meetings to work through the second, third, and fourth drafts of the permit. “There were dozens of sticking points but we talked through them and came to the board hand in hand,” said Kirsten James of HTB. The majority of negotiation time was devoted to LID provisions, percent of water to be maintained on site, infill development standards, monitoring, costs, flow controls, and numeric affluent limits.

The Impact

Stormwater is the largest source of water pollution in California. It threatens human health, ecosystem functions, biological diversity, recreation, economic activity, and general community well being. “This permit will have a tremendous impact on protecting Ventura County’s watershed and coastal resources,” said Mark Gold of HTB. “It is a model for future stormwater controls for California and the nation.”

“The inclusion of numeric LID requirements is the most significant aspect of the permit,” noted David Beckman of NRDC. Not only will LID control runoff, but it also addresses drought, enhances local water supply and quality, mitigates the effects of climate change, and provides more green space. Moreover, LID is the most cost-effective solution to achieve compliance of TMDLs. Under the permit, 95 percent of potential runoff from new and redevelopment projects in Ventura County must be captured and recycled. If developers cannot meet performance

“It took courage on the part of the environmental groups, public agencies, and regional board to adopt the most stringent standards on stormwater runoff ever imposed.”

**Rick Cole
Ventura County Manager**

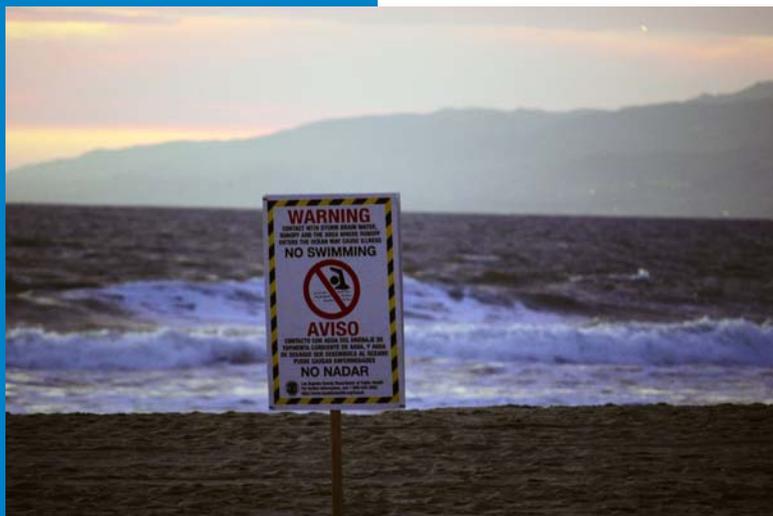


Photo
Beach Advisory, courtesy of
Suzanne Masterson Photography

standards, they must mitigate the effect offsite. The permit also states, “[i]f funding from state and federal sources is not available for beach water quality monitoring, the Principal Permittee shall conduct weekly year-round...sampling and analysis” for the ten most sensitive beaches in Southern California, including Rincon, Oil Piers, and Oxnard beaches.

The Ventura County permit sets a new high bar for stormwater requirements and enforceability. Now, implementation must live up to the spirit of the agreement. To that end, Wishtoyo Foundation’s Ventura Coastkeeper Program redesigned its [Watershed Monitoring Program](#) to

monitor both urban stormwater outfalls and receiving waters to ensure compliance.

Since the Ventura County permit adoption, several municipalities, including north and south Orange County and the City of San Francisco, have passed their own versions of the LID provision. In 2010, San Bernardino and Riverside counties are scheduled to adopt similar provisions.

Building industry representatives appealed the permit’s LID provision to the State Water Resources Control Board. The board will likely take up the appeal and issue a decision in 2010.

Leading Environmental Groups Involved:

- ▶ [Natural Resources Defense Council](#)
- ▶ [Heal the Bay](#)

Honorable Mention:

Santa Monica Baykeeper Forces the City of LA to Reduce Sewage Spills

In 1998, [Santa Monica Baykeeper](#) filed suit over the City of Los Angeles’ 20,000 violations of the Clean Water Act. The city averaged two sewage spills a day and failed to report, clean up, or stop the spills. The [six-year legal battle](#) came to an end in 2004 when the parties settled. The city agreed to replace at least 488 miles of sewer lines, clean 2,800 miles of sewers every year, and increase the capacity of the system. The city also was required to spend \$8.5 million on restoration projects to improve water quality in Los Angeles. In 2009, the city was ahead of the implementation schedule and [reported a 77 percent reduction in sewage spills](#) since the case was initiated. “The results of this achievement are pretty significant and affect many underserved communities,” commented Coastal Commissioner Esther Sanchez.