

# VENTURA COUNTY

# STAR



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## Fish restoration to cost \$2.1 billion

### ■ Feds unveil 100-year plan for steelhead

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Restoring endangered steelhead trout to the Southern California rivers and streams where they once swam in abundance

will cost as much as \$2.1 billion over the next 100 years, according to a new federal report.

Along with a financial commitment, a "shift in society attitudes, understanding, priorities and practices" concerning water use will be needed to save the fish that swim between the ocean and rivers, according to the more than 600-page Southern California Steelhead Recovery Plan recent-

ly released by the National Marine Fisheries.

Beyond the steelhead, people stand to gain from the restoration by increased tourism, job creation and an improved river ecosystem, the plan states.

"It is an ecosystem-based approach where we are looking at healthy watersheds that people use for all kinds of reasons," said Mark Capelli, the Marine

Fisheries Service's steelhead recovery coordinator.

Bringing the steelhead back, however, is a long, challenging and expensive process that is not guaranteed to work. The recovery plan estimates it will cost \$1.7 billion to \$2.1 billion in the next 80 to 100 years.

About 500 returning adult steelhead exist today, compared with an estimated 45,000 that swam in rivers before World War

II. Grainy black-and-white photos show smiling fishermen displaying stringers full of the fish.

As Southern California grew, development, flood-control measures, agriculture, ranching, mining, dams and other activity severely depleted steelhead habitat, forcing it onto the endangered species list in 1997.

See TROUT, 2A

## FROM THE COVER

TROUT  
from 1A

"It will likely take decades to restore these fish to the coastal rivers and streams where they once thrived," said Penny Ruvelas, a fisheries supervisor in Southern California for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "But this plan is a very significant step in achieving that goal."

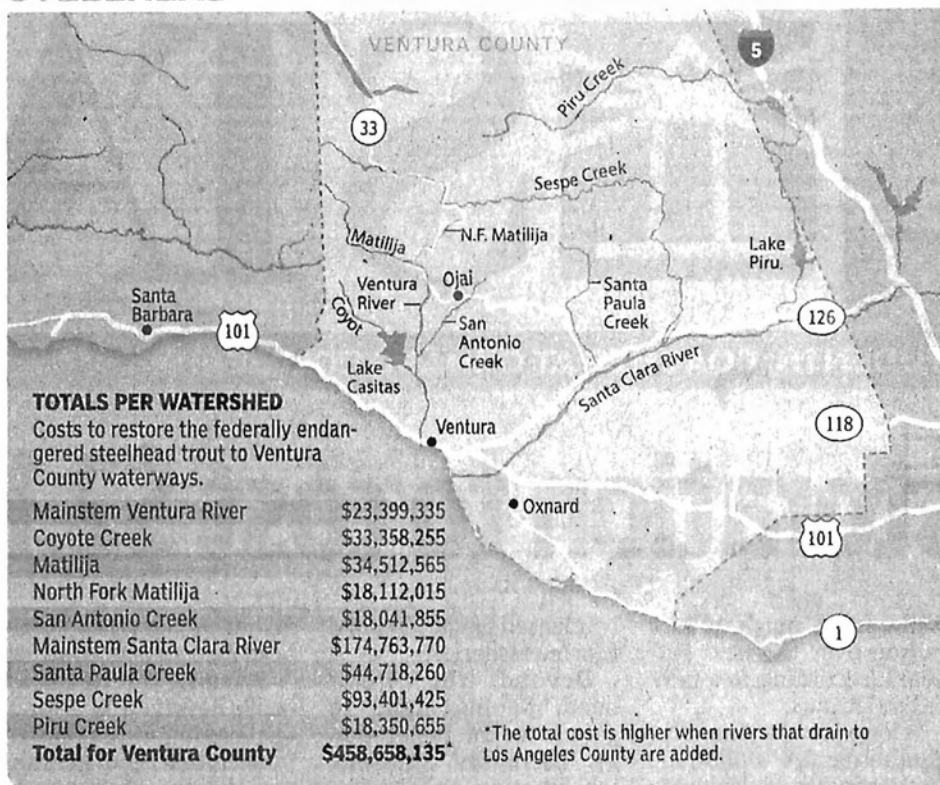
In Ventura County, at least \$459 million will be needed to return steelhead to the nine rivers and creeks where they once flourished. Much of that is to "restore natural channel features" in waterways. The price tag is likely higher, as some waterways that start in Ventura County and drain to Los Angeles are not included in that figure. More than \$156 million will be needed for estuary restoration and management along the Santa Clara River.

The plan is a guide for steelhead recovery, not a firm blueprint of who should do what. It says only, for example, that better fish passage is needed around the Freeman Diversion and Santa Felicia Dam, both run by the United Water Conservation District on the Santa Clara River. It doesn't spell out how it should happen.

Although United Water long fought against modifying the Freeman Diversion, General Manager Mike Solomon said the district now is committed to doing what must be done under the Endangered Species Act, even if it is costly. The district has no choice, he said.

"The Endangered Species Act is the law

## STEELHEAD



of the land, and it is our responsibility to be in compliance with it," he said. "We will do everything we can do to be in compliance."

The district already has spent \$3.5 million on studies looking at how to improve fish passage around Santa Felicia Dam, which holds Lake Piru. It recently spent \$450,000 more for a study on fish-passage construction. In the coming years, it may spend as much as \$30 million for a rock ramp for steelhead at the Freeman Diversion.

Water rates have risen 500 percent in the past nine years, in large part because of new environmental regulations, he said.

"We are raising prices, and the costs are going up, and we haven't even started building yet," he said. "The federal gov-

ernment does not look at how much it costs to do it. They just say you have to do it. At what point does the cost get too much?"

The Casitas Municipal Water District spent \$9 million to build a fish ladder on the Ventura River to comply with the Endangered Species Act.

Capelli said while \$2.1 billion might seem like a lot, it will not come from any one source and will be spread out over 100 years. Also, many of the needed restoration projects are already being done through other groups and activities.

Even more challenging than funding the projects may be the needed shift in attitudes toward water and natural resources, he said. But that's already started, too, he said, citing examples such as the city of Ventura, which committed to reuse much

of its wastewater instead of releasing it into a nearby estuary.

"It is a shift that is being seen in a lot of different areas, not just steelhead recovery," he said.

Ron Bottorff, chairman of Friends of the Santa Clara River, which has been pushing for restoration of the river for years, said people have a moral imperative to fix what they broke.

"The larger picture is that we are responsible for all these species going under," he said.

Humans spend billions on other, frivolous things, he said. By comparison, \$2 billion over 100 years to restore waterways in an area as vast as Southern California is not "unreasonable," he said.

On the Net:  
[http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/recovery/So\\_Cal.htm](http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/recovery/So_Cal.htm)