THE VENTURA RIVER RECREATIONAL AREA AND FISHERY: A PRELIMINARY REPORT AND PROPOSAL

Prepared for the Ventura County Board of Supervisors

county of ventura

County Fish and Game Commission

March 1, 1973

Re: The Ventura River Recreational Area and Fishery

In 1970, the Ventura County Fish and Game Commission initiated an investigation into the nature and scope of pollution in the Ventura River. Out of this investigation, an interest developed in protecting the river's existing resources and restoring its historic trout and steelhead fisheries.

In 1972, the Commission budgeted and money was approved to conduct an in-depth study to determine the feasibility of restoring the Ventura River for habitation and propagation of steelhead rainbow trout.

Based upon a preliminary investigation, it is the opinion of the Commission that with a proper land and water management program the natural resources of the Ventura River can and should be protected and that its historic trout and steelhead fisheries can and should be restored.

The attached preliminary report, the result of the study begun in 1972, has been presented to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors for review and comment. It is also being distributed to other public agencies and interested individuals, as well as being made available at local libraries, in order to better solicit comments from a wide spectrum of the community.

It is our hope that all interested parties will take the time to communicate their thoughts and comments on this matter to the Commission or directly to the Board of Supervisors.

Sincerely,

James Donlon

JAMES DONLON, Chairman
Ventura County Fish and
Game Commission

c/o County Executive, 168 North Brent Street, Room 202, Ventura, California 93003 (805) 648-6131

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A PRELIMINARY REPORT AND PROPOSAL

from

THE VENTURA COUNTY FISH AND GAME COMMISSION

MARCH 1, 1973

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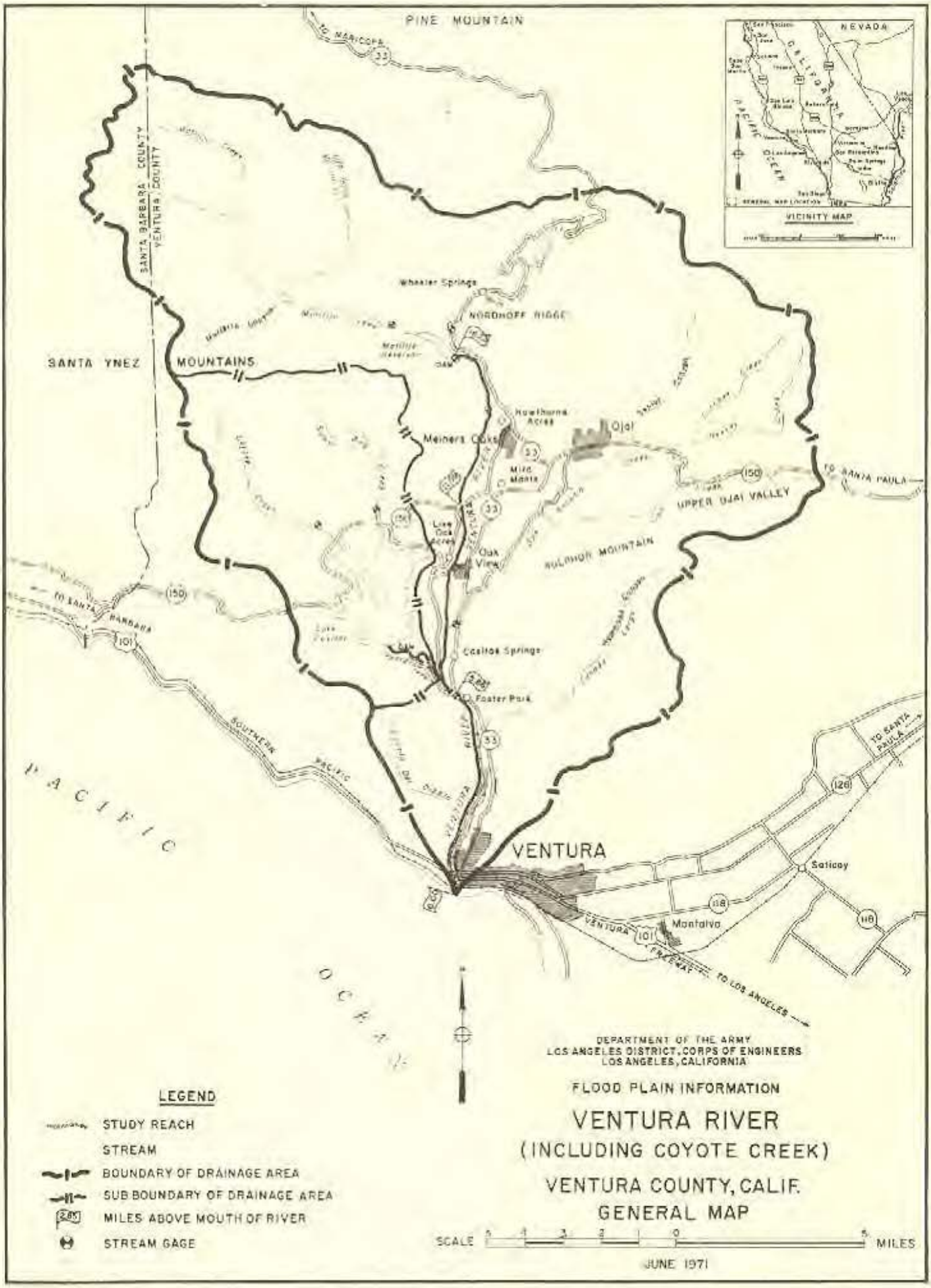

LEGEND

- STUDY REACH
- STREAM
- BOUNDARY OF DRAINAGE AREA
- SUB BOUNDARY OF DRAINAGE AREA
- 28.5 MILES ABOVE MOUTH OF RIVER
- STREAM GAGE

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

FLOOD PLAIN INFORMATION

VENTURA RIVER
(INCLUDING COYOTE CREEK)
VENTURA COUNTY, CALIF.
GENERAL MAP

SCALE 5 4 3 2 1 0 5 MILES

JUNE 1971

A PRELIMINARY REPORT AND PROPOSAL

from

THE VENTURA COUNTY FISH AND GAME COMMISSION

Subject: The Ventura River Recreational Area and Fishery

The Ventura River issues from the northernmost major river basin in southern California. Until the recent past, the Ventura River was essentially a free-flowing stream bordered by a typical coastal riparian habitat. There were numerous deep holes throughout its course and the water was clean. Fish and wildlife were abundant.

Land Features

The main stem of the Ventura River originates at the junction of the Matilija Creek and the North Fork of the Ventura River and flows generally in a southerly direction about sixteen miles to the Pacific Ocean. The Ventura River has a relatively steep gradient (ranging from forty feet per mile at the mouth to about ninety feet per mile at its headwaters) and drains an area of approximately 228 square miles.

Rugged mountains and comparatively narrow valleys cut by streams flowing into two principal valleys characterize the topography of the Ventura River basin. A large mountainous area, most of which lies within the Los Padres National Forest, completely surrounds the valley sections, so that the ratio of mountainous and foothill area to valley area is greater than six to one. The crest of the mountains along the outer boundary of the basin rises to a height of 6,025 feet. Like nearly all California coastal streams, the Ventura River terminates in a brackish lagoon which is subject to tidal action when not closed by a sand bar.

Geology and Soils

Approximately 85% of the area within the Ventura River basin

is composed of relatively impervious deposits. The exposed rock is sedimentary in origin and in most cases easily eroded. The primary geologic formations are well-cemented and interbedded sandstones, shales, and conglomerates, which produce or absorb very little water except along joints and fractures. The streambed of the lower two-thirds of the Ventura River widens to a flood plain of pervious materials subject to high percolation. These materials consist of alluvial deposits of silt, sand, gravel, and rounded boulders common to intermittent coastal streams.

Vegetation

Both mountains and valleys within the basin support an abundant growth of native chaparral, annual grasses, and a variety of trees. Live oaks, sycamores, alders, cottonwoods, willows, and other water-associated plants are found along the streamsides, while conifers are found at the higher elevations. In some areas the vegetation is extremely dense, though occasionally sections are denuded by fires.

Climate and Rainfall

The climate of the Ventura River basin is characterized by two seasons: a cool, wet winter and a dry, warm summer. The average rainfall for the drainage area ranges from about sixteen inches near the mouth of the river to about forty inches in the mountains, with Matilija Canyon generally receiving the heaviest rainfall within the basin. Snow is common during the winter months in the higher elevations, but it does not normally contribute significantly to stream run-off. About 75% of the run-off in the Ventura River occurs from January through April.

Principal Tributaries

The principal tributaries of the Ventura River have almost perfect fan-shaped drainage systems.

The North Fork of the Ventura River originates in the headwaters of the basin and has a steep mountainous drainage area comprising sixteen square miles. The average gradient of the North Fork of the Ventura River is about 460 feet per mile.

Matilija Creek originates in the north-western sector of the basin, has a drainage area of fifty-six square miles and an average gradient of 200 feet per mile. Matilija Creek is joined by the North Fork of the Matilija Creek and a smaller tributary, the Murrietta Creek. The longest course of flow through this area is 15.6 miles along the main stem of the Matilija Creek. Matilija Creek joins the Ventura River sixteen miles above the river's mouth.

San Antonio Creek originates on the southerly slopes of the Topatopa Mountains and has a drainage area of fifty-two square miles. The average gradient of San Antonio Creek is sixty feet per mile. The longest course of flow is 11.4 miles. San Antonio Creek joins the Ventura River eight miles above the river's mouth.

Coyote Creek is the principal tributary of the Ventura River in the west-central sector of the basin. Coyote Creek has a drainage area of forty-one square miles and an average gradient of 260 feet per mile. Coyote Creek is joined by the Santa Ana Creek, which has an average gradient of 380 feet per mile. The longest course of flow through this area is 16.6 miles along the Coyote Creek. Coyote Creek joins the Ventura River six miles above the river's mouth in the vicinity of Foster Park.

Historic Fisheries Resources

Prior to 1947, the Ventura River was a highly productive trout and steelhead stream.[1]

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1. A steelhead is a rainbow trout that has spent some portion of its life in the sea. After migrating to sea, the adult steelhead returns to fresh water to spawn, usually to the stream of its birth. Other fish indigenous to the Ventura River are the partially armored three-spined sticleback, santa ana sucker, and arroyo chub.

Historical records and interviews with residents indicate that the Ventura River supplied neighboring communities with consistently good trout and steelhead fishing from its headwaters north of Ojai to its mouth at the Pacific Ocean. Early issues of local newspapers contain frequent accounts of fishermen taking large numbers of trout between the site now known as Foster Park and the mouth of the river. A tourist guide published in San Francisco in the late 1800's (Chittenden, c. 1885) advertized that the streams of the Ventura River basin "abound with trout, especially the Ventura, as it emerges from the mountains, through the well-known hot springs canyon of Matilija." Travelling through San Buenaventura, Chase (1913) reported "a fine stream flows into the sea at the western edge of the city, and from May to October the breakfast tables of Ventura need never go troutless."

Writing in California Fish and Game, Fry (1938) described the Ventura River as one of the few streams in southern California having trout water down to the ocean and included the river in a list of "consistently good streams in southern California"

Local fishermen (Henke, 1970; Barnes, 1973) recall regularly taking limits of trout as far down as the Main Street bridge in San Buenaventura during the 1930's and through the 1940's. Local fishermen (Colla, 1973; Peirano, 1973) recall taking limits of sizeable trout further upstream in the vicinity of the Foster Park bridge through the early 1950's.[2]

The Ventura River also supported until 1947 a substantial steelhead fishery. Jordan (1925) recorded the range of steel-

2. Photographs of several of these fish are on file with the Ventura County Fish and Game Commission.
3. More recent research by the California Department of Fish and Game has determined that the original range of the steelhead rainbow trout was from central Alaska to the Mexican border. Water projects and pollution generated by California's burgeoning population have decimated populations south of San Francisco.

head from the Ventura and Santa Clara Rivers in Ventura County northward.[3] The California Department of Fish and Game (Hubbs, 1946) reported "large and consistent runs of steelhead into the Ventura and Santa Clara Rivers . . ." Field representatives for the California Department of Fish and Game (Clanton and Jarvis, 1946) estimated that in a normal year a minimum of between 4000 and 5000 adult steelhead entered the Ventura River to spawn.

Relating his steelhead fishing experiences in California, Henke (1970) has written, "The Ventura River had great runs of steelhead starting any time after the rains began in the fall . . . These runs would continue right up until late March and early April. The later runs were much larger fish and I can remember seeing schools where the average was ten to thirteen pounds. Most of these runs would return to the ocean after spawning . . . . Approximately five miles inland from the mouth was a famous historical county landmark called Foster Park, and this was the limits and boundary of winter steelheading."[4]

Historically, the size of the steelhead runs in the Ventura River has varied with prevailing water conditions. As a result of the unpredictable pattern of rainfall along the southern California coast, stretches of the Ventura River have periodically gone dry or retained very little surface water during the summer months. Long time observers have noted that frequently there has been little or no surface water in the river-bed during the summer months between the Hollingsworth Ranch (eight miles above the river's mouth) and the former Soper's Ranch (fourteen miles above the river's mouth).[5]

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4. The Ventura County Historical Society maintains a photographic record of the trout and steelhead taken from the Ventura River between 1909 and 1973.
5. In the past, a large diversion drew out water in the vicinity of the Matilija Ranch to the extent that the river-bed in this area occasionally went completely dry, thus requiring a small amount of steelhead rescue work be performed along a four mile stretch of the Ventura River.

This phenomenon of the river "pooling up" during the summer months is characteristic of many California coastal streams. Shapovalov and Taft (1954), after conducting a four year study of the life histories of steelhead rainbow trout in a typical California coastal stream, observed that "the mouths of most California steelhead streams are closed by sand bars during the summer months and that in some cases the lower courses of the streams are entirely dry, so that no fresh water reaches the ocean."

While not presenting optimum water conditions, this phenomenon has not prohibited the survival of trout and steelhead fisheries in coastal streams such as the Ventura River. On the contrary, coastal streams with direct access to the ocean have historically been exceptionally productive. Welch, writing in California Fish and Game (1929) reports that prior to the establishment of a daily limit, it was not unusual for a fisherman to take from 100 to 300 trout from a California coastal stream. The Ventura Signal (1878) reported three fishermen taking 463 trout in the lower reaches of the Ventura River in a single day. Nor is the size of the sea-run steelhead directly correlated to the size of the home stream. The Ventura Free Press (1911) reported a steelhead taken from the Ventura River by George Pacheco measuring thirty-six inches and weighing fourteen pounds. Steelhead ranging in size from six to nine pounds were taken commonly from the Ventura River until 1947.

The problem of marginal water, however, has been seriously aggravated in the Ventura River by the construction of several dams and by sinking wells into the river's aquifer. These dams and wells, in combination with a prolonged series of drought years, have caused additional stretches of the river to dry up which normally retained surface water during even the driest summer months.

The trout and steelhead fishing provided by the Ventura River generated considerable public interest. A number of hotels on Santa Clara Street in San Buenaventura catered to out-of-town fishermen,

while the elaborate Anacapa Hotel, formerly situated on the corner of Main and Palm Streets, reserved the ground floor during the trout season for fishing guests. Post cards depicting local fishermen with their steelhead catches were printed in the hopes of attracting tourists. Several sporting goods stores (Star-Free Press, 1948; Marcus, 1973) sponsored annual steelhead fishing contests as late as 1948. Census checks have shown 259 fishermen on the opening day of the winter steelhead fishing season along the five mile stretch open to steelhead fishing between Foster Park and the ocean. Clanton and Jarvis (1946) estimated that the trout and steelhead sport fisheries of the Ventura River system contributed $100,000 annually to the county's economy.

Development in the Ventura River Valley

Development in the Ventura River Valley has been generally restricted to areas above the flood plain of the Ventura River.[6]

Of the population presently existing in the unprotected portions of the flood plain, the greater part is concentrated in the small residential communities of Casitas Springs, Live Oak Acres, and Hawthorne Acres.[7] In addition, the western end of the city of San Buenaventura extends to the river's bank at the mouth. This portion of the city is protected against flooding by an earth and rock levee which runs along the west bank of the Ventura River for a distance of about three miles.

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6. A major portion of the Ventura River Valley, including the riverbed, is privately owned. Portions of the river and flood plain at the mouth are owned by the State of California and the city of San Buenaventura. The balance of land is controlled by the County of Ventura, the United States, and the Ventura County Flood Control District. The Flood Control District, in addition, holds flowage easements along portions of the Ventura River.
7. Casitas Springs, the largest of these communities, has a population of 1,113.

There are two major dams, a weir, and a diversion facility in the Ventura River basin. The Matilija dam, situated 16.2 miles above the river's mouth, was completed in 1948. Matilija dam was built by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with the Ventura County Flood Control District, to provide additional water to local communities and reduce flood hazards in the Ventura River Valley. Its original storage capacity was 7000 acre feet. However, as a result of siltation and a large notch cut into the dam's face in 1965, the storage capacity of the lake has been reduced to approximately 2400 acre feet. Deteriorating concrete continues to be a problem, and plans are currently being made to study the necessity of widening the present notch. The Matilija dam is normally drained after each major storm. A nearly continuous flow of water is released the year round to satisfy downstream water rights.[8] At the request of the California Department of Fish and Game, a fish ladder and holding tank for the transportation of migrating steelhead was constructed at the base of the dam in 1947.[9]

Approximately two miles below Matilija dam, the Los Robles diversion facility, consisting of a small rockfill dam, headgates, and four miles of concrete canal, has been constructed by the Casitas Municipal Water District to divert winter run-off from the Ventura River to Lake Casitas. The flow capacity of this canal is 500 cubic feet per second.

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8. The Ventura County Flood Control District, which owns Matilija dam, has an agreement with the Casitas Municipal Water District whereby the Water District assumes responsibility for normal maintenance on the dam and the principle and interests on outstanding bonds for the construction of the dam in exchange for the available water rights.

9. Field representatives for the California Department of Fish and Game (Clanton and Jarvis, 1946) advised that "The spillway on this dam should be an inclined apron with a deep hole at the bottom instead of a direct fall. By utilizing this type of spillway both adult and fingerling steelhead could pass over the dam without loss on their downward migration . . . In the spring of the year, water should be released over the spillway for as long as is possible (to facilitate this seaward migration)."

The Casitas dam, situated 6.5 miles above the mouth of the Ventura River on the Coyote-Santa Ana Creek watershed, was completed in 1959. Built by the Bureau of Reclamation in cooperation with the Casitas Municipal Water District, the dam is designed to impound water for industrial, agricultural, and domestic use within the District. Casitas Lake has a storage capacity of 250,000 acre feet and a safe yield of approximately 20,000 acre feet. Presently there is no flow in Coyote Creek below the dam which reaches the Ventura River. The Casitas Municipal Water District has indicated that it is required to release only sufficient water downstream to satisfy one prior water right.[10]

An underground weir runs across the Coyote Creek and Ventura River beds approximately 400 yards north of the Foster Park bridge (six miles above the river's mouth). Constructed in 1906 by the Ventura Power Company, the weir is designed to raise the water table to feed several municipal pumps upstream. The weir is 973 feet long and sixty-five feet deep at its eastern extremity; it extends from the west bank of the Ventura River at the confluence of the Coyote Creek and stops 300 feet short of spanning the full breadth of both streams. The city of San Buenaventura has placed five pumps approximately 100 to 500 yards above the weir and now diverts from 3000 to 6000 acre feet annually into its treatment plant to serve the water needs of the city of San Buenaventura. Tentative plans had been made by the California Department of Fish and Game in cooperation with the Ventura County Flood Control District (Cook, 1946; Ryan, 1946) to construct a fish ladder, trap, and holding tank on the exposed portion of the weir in 1946. This facility, however, was never completed. A 300 foot span of this weir is presently exposed to a height of four feet.

In addition to these structures, there are a number of pri-

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10. Presently, this release amounts to approximately six acre feet per year.

vately operated wells and gravel diversions along the upper Ventura River.

The reach of stream from Foster Park to the ocean, however, is the area of the most serious pollution. Koebig & Koebig (1972) reported large amounts of particulate matter, organic forms, detergents, and algae present in the lower reaches of the river emanating most probably from sewage effluent, industrial wastes, and fertilizers. Koebig & Koebig concluded that the "influence of these factors alone is most probably responsible for an extremely low diversity and population of aquatic invertebrates and fishes."

The Oak View Sanitation District operates a secondary sewage treatment facility 4.5 miles above the river's mouth. Approximately two cubic feet per second of treated sewage effluent is released into the river at this point. The effect on the aquatic life is marked. A small gravel levee designed to divert stream flow to a private pump has been constructed in the middle of the stream and extends 150 yards downstream from the plant site, separating temporarily the natural stream flow from the sewage effluent. Treated sewage is released on the east side of the levee, where vegetation is luxuriant; the stream channel, however, displays a sparse population of fishes. On the west side of this levee (Johnson, 1970; Capelli, 1973) numerous trout fry and other fishes have been observed in the marginal but clear water.

Since 1951, the Shell Oil Company has operated a urea plant 3.5 miles above the mouth of the river. This plant has been a source of significant pollution in the past. The California Department of Fish and Game has cited the company on several ocassions for polluting the Ventura River; the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles found the Shell Oil Company guilty of polluting the river in 1972. The plant has now ceased operations. Its future use, however, has not been determined.

Further downstream, the Ventura River passes through the Ven-

tura Avenue Oil Fields. There are numerous sumps, holding ponds for water-flood systems, and other facilities that possess a serious potential for pollution. Several oil companies in this area have been cited for polluting the Ventura River within the past year.

The Southern Pacific Milling Company has operated a sand and gravel pit mine 1.5 miles above the river's mouth since 1961. The lease site covers 247 square acres in the river bed and flood plain, twenty of which are currently used for the plant site and storage. Approximately 200,000 tons of material is excavated annually from the flood plain and river channel, seriously disrupting the natural stream and riparian community. The plant operates with a county conditional use permit which will expire August 5, 1973; extension of the permit will require the preparation of an environmental impact review.

Present Fisheries Resources

Developments in the Ventura River Valley following 1946 have significantly altered the Ventura River. Most importantly, a burgeoning population has put increasing demands on local water resources.

The construction of Matilija dam in 1948 cut-off an important spawning area in the Ventura River system, decimating the river's trout and steelhead fisheries. The construction of Casitas dam in 1959 further reduced the river's flow and cut-off two additional spawning nursery areas, leaving only the San Antonio Creek and the North Fork of the Ventura River accessible to migrating steelhead. Many holes have been filled in, while portions of the riparian community have been periodically stripped from the flood plain through gravel mining and flood control operations.

The lower reaches of the Ventura River below Foster Park, in

addition, have been seriously polluted by a variety of industrial, agricultural, and municipal effluents. Of these, the effluents from the Oak View Biofiltration Sewage Treatment Plant, the Shell Chemical Plant, and the Ventura Avenue Oil Fields have had the most deleterious effect on the river's ecology.

Despite these developments, the Ventura River's fisheries have not been entirely destroyed.

The North Fork of the Ventura River, which commences above the confluence of the Matilija Creek (sixteen miles above the river's mouth), maintains a small consistent flow of clean water and is stocked annually with trout by the California Department of Fish and Game.

Clean water in small quantities is present commencing immediately north of the Los Robles diversion dam (fourteen miles above the river's mouth) and extends to the base of Matilija dam (sixteen miles above the river's mouth). This stretch of water supports a small population of trout and other indigenous fishes.

A variable flow of clean water is also present commencing several hundred yards above the confluence of the San Antonio Creek (eight miles above the river's mouth) and extending to the site of the Oak View Biofiltration Treatment Plant (five miles above the river's mouth). Small numbers of trout (Capelli, 1972) ranging in size from six to thirteen inches have been taken from this stretch of stream above the Foster Park bridge within the past year.[11] Bluegill and small mouth bass are also present throughout this section of the Ventura River.

A continuous flow of water exists between the site of the

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11. Photographs of several of these fish are on file with the Ventura County Fish and Game Commission.

Oak View Biofiltration Treatment Plant and the Southern Pacific Railroad bridge (.2 of a mile above the river's mouth), primarily the product of the Oak View plant's sewage effluent. Presently there exists no sport fisheries along this stretch of the river. Small numbers of partially armored three-spined stickleback, arroyo chubs, and santa ana suckers, however, persist in the lower reaches of the river down to the Main Street bridge in San Buenaventura (.5 of a mile above the river's mouth).*

Together with these fisheries, local fishermen also report taking small numbers of steelhead almost annually from the Ventura River. Hogan (1973) reports fishing the Ventura River for steelhead consistently since 1954 and taking fish "every year the rains were sufficient . . . to allow the river to run into the ocean for a week or more." Bugg (1973) reports taking several steelhead in the Ventura River measuring twenty-three inches and weighing three pounds during the 1951-1952 season.[12] Bugg also reports taking twelve steelhead measuring eighteen inches during the 1971-1972 season below the confluence of the San Antonio Creek.

Describing his steelhead fishing experience on the Ventura River during the 1968-1969 season, Hogan (1973) has written, "During a two week period I landed eleven fish to seventeen inches. Although I landed but one 'roe chaser' (14 inches) in the lagoon, I did see several fish of good size roll on three separate occasions. During this time I talked with several people who had seen fairly large fish below the Casitas diversion dam and in San Antonio Creek. I personally observed, on two separate occasions, two fish in a shallow hole (in San Antonio Creek) near Camp Comfort. I believed them to be spawning and did not molest them. These fish were two to three pounds. I had heard of quite a few fish other than mine being taken during that time,

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12. A photograph of several of these fish are on file with the Ventura County Fish and Game Commission.

*With the heavy rains of the past season, trout have moved down into the lower reaches of the Ventura River and have been taken as far down as the Main Street bridge.

but personally saw nine fish landed of size large enough to call good fish. These fish being two to four and a half pounds." Hogan concluded, "I believe that over the past fifteen or sixteen years . . . many more fish would have been taken, but due to a lack of fishermen on the river this has not been the case. When there exists favorable water conditions, I fish three or four times a week and seldom see another angler."[13]

Local fishermen (Hogan, 1972; Barnes, 1973: Peirano, 1973) generally agree that 1955 was the most productive steelhead season on the Ventura River in recent history.

Proposal

The Ventura County Fish and Game Commission recognizes that the close proximity of the Ventura River to an urban area offers an unusual opportunity for a unique recreational resource; that river's deterioration is largely the result of its neglect and abuse; and that, finally, the Ventura River can with proper management be restored.

The Commission, therefore, purposes two related, but distinct projects on the Ventura River: (1) the restoration of a live stream along the lower reaches of the river, free from pollution and development incompatable with a live recreation stream, and (2) the restoration of the river's once highly productive sport fisheries.

Both proposals will require that a master plan be prepared for the preservation and maintenance of the area's natural resources for their intrinsic, recreational, and educational value, and that the plan recognize recreational and educational use of the river and its immediate environs as the highest and best use of the area.

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13. The largest steelhead Hogan reports taking during the 1968-1969 season measured twenty-two inches. A photograph of this and another fish taken the same year is on file with the Ventura County Fish and Game Commission.

The first proposal envisions a small creek characterized by a series of riffles, rapids, and pools.[14] Full protection of the river and its immediate surroundings are the mandates: in short, a cessation of pollution, pit mining, channelization, and building in the river and on its immediate flood plain. Such a management program will require restrictions on land use within the Ventura River Valley beyond those currently invoked.

The first proposal is fundamental, and may be taken as the first phase in the restoration of the Ventura River's historic fisheries. The second proposal would involve additional sources of water for the support of a viable sport fishery and special restrictions in the management of the river's wildlife resources.

Access, which is presently restricted to areas at the mouth of the river and in the vicinity of Foster Park, is one of the principal drawbacks to the development of the full nonconsumptive use of the Ventura River area. Both proposals would, therefore, also require the acquisition of privately held lands to be managed for public use.

Restoring the lower reaches of the Ventura River to a live recreational stream would entail:

(1) Discouraging further encroachment on the river for agricultural, commercial, industrial, or other purposes through local controls and tax incentives on a interim basis, until a more permanent solution to the problem can be reached agreeable to all parties.

(2) Reducing pollution to levels compatible with a living recreational stream.

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14. The amount of water necessary to create such a situation between the Foster Park bridge and the Pacific Ocean is estimated to be between five and ten cubic feet per second.

(3) Creating a permanent corridor of open space along both east and west banks of the Ventura River.

(4) Upgrading the water released from the Oak View Biofiltration Sewage Treatment Plant and returning the treated water to the Ventura River.

(5) Prohibiting the further removal of material from the Ventura River channel for commercial purposes.

(6) Developing a flood control plan for the Ventura River compatible with the maintenance of a natural stream-bed and attendant aquatic life.

(7) Developing a comprehensive land use plan along the Ventura River compatible with a live recreational stream.

Restoring the trout and steelhead sport fisheries in the Ventura River would entail:

(1) Developing a comprehensive tertiary sewage treatment plan for the Ventura River and Ojai Valleys designed to enhance water conditions in the main stem of the Ventura River and in the San Antonio Creek.

(2) Adjusting the safe yield of the Casitas reservoir to provide for the release of water into the Ventura River during the critical spring and summer months.

(3) Providing a fish passage at the Los Robles diversion dam to facilitate the spring and winter migration of steelhead and reestablishing access to the prime spawning and nursery grounds.

(4) Developing special restrictions such as artificial lures and minimum size requirements in the management of the river's sport fisheries.

Local Interest and Support

The local citizenry has expressed its concern for the future of the Ventura River and its support for the river's protection and restoration.

This concern was dramatically demonstrated May 22, 1972 at a public hearing held by the San Buenaventura City Council to consider the formation of an assessment district to finance the construction of a levee on the west bank near the river's mouth. The proposed levee would have opened up over 100 acres to commercial development on the river's flood plain and effectively channelized the lower reaches of the stream.

The 1,400 people from neighboring communities attending the public hearing demonstrated a unified effort unprecedented in Ventura County. The hearing, which was telecast over local radio and television, drew the largest crowd ever to attend a city council meeting in San Buenaventura. Acknowledging this widespread public interest, the staff of the Ventura County Star-Free Press voted the Ventura River project one of the top five news stories of Ventura County in 1972.

In addition to the individuals appearing at the May 22, 1972 public hearing, the live river project has been endorsed in concept by the following civic organizations: Ventura County League of Women Voters, Greater Ventura Chamber of Commerce (Environmental Affairs Committee, Legislative Affairs Committee, and the Board of Directors), American Legion Post #399, Ventura County Chapter of the American Association of University Women, Environmental Coalition of Ventura County, Los Padres Chapter of the Sierra Club, Trout Unlimited, and the California Committee of Two Million.

Several public agencies have also indicated a willingness to cooperate with the Commission in developing a more detailed plan for the protection and restoration of the Ventura River.

Funding

A combination of local, state, and federal monies beyond the Ventura County Fish and Game fund will be essential to support the necessary studies and develop the required facilities. Much, however, can be accomplished in the early stages of the river's restoration through proper land management and enforcement of existing statutes relating to the conservation of wildlife resources.[15] Potential sources of funds include: the Anadromous Fisheries Act, Dingell-Johnson Fish Restoration Act, Cobey-Alquist Flood Plain Management Act, and the California Wildlife Conservation Board.

Conclusion

Restoring the Ventura River is a bold undertaking, but it is a challenge that can be met if public and private agencies are willing to work together. The underlying thesis here is that wildlife resources can be restored by the creative use of the same tools and techniques that have in the past been used to reduce or destroy these resources.

A proposal to restore the Ventura River necessarily raises fundamental questions about resource management and the life styles of the neighboring communities.

Management of the Ventura River basin and of its water resources has been primarily aimed to stimulate economic expansion, while the recreational and scenic values of the Ventura River have been generally overlooked. No water has been budgeted for the protection of the river's fisheries. Municipalities, industry, and agriculture have commonly regarded the Ventura River as a convenient sewer with small concern for the effects on wildlife.

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15. The San Buenaventura Department of Community Development, for example, has proposed that the flood plain area of the Ventura River lying within the city's boundaries and sphere of influence be retained in open space.

Private wells sunk into the river's aquifer have been operated without adequate supervision, while harmful wastes continue to be released into the river. As a result of these abuses, hikers, fishermen, bird-watchers, and particularly the young people of the neighboring communities have been denied an historically important recreational resource.

Water, certainly, is a central consideration in any proposal to restore the Ventura River. Properly framed, however, the question is not where will the required water be obtained, but rather, how will those water resources available now and those which will be available in the near future be allocated. Will the existing and planned water resources be used to support increased industrial activity and encourage an expansion of the present population without sufficient regard to the social, cultural, and environmental costs? Or will a more balanced approach to resource management be developed that will insure long term stability and preservation of historic natural amenities?[16] The answers given to these questions will ultimately determine the future of the Ventura River.

In its meandering sweep to the ocean, the Ventura River flows through country that still retains much of the flavor of

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16. The State Water Resources Control Board has adopted a set of beneficial water use definitions in conjunction with the Comprehensive Water Quality Management Planning Program. Those relevent to the proposals outlined here include: Water Contact Recreation (REC-1), includes all recreational uses involving actual body contact with water, such as swimming, wading, waterskiing, skin diving, surfing, sport fishing, uses in therapeutic spas, and other uses where ingestion of water is reasonably possible; Cold Fresh-Water Habitat (COLD), provides a coldwater habitat to sustain aquatic resources associated with a coldwater environment; Wildlife Habitat (WILD), provides a water supply and vegetative habitat for the maintenance of wildlife; Fish Migration (MIGR), provides a migration route and temporary aquatic environment for anadromous or other fish species; Fish Spawning (SPWN), provides a high quality aquatic habitat especially suitable for fish spawning.

early California: rolling hills dotted with live oaks, the valley floor lined with sycamores, cottonwoods, and alders, and the steep hills covered with a thick growth of chaparral and scattered conifers. A land and water management program compatible with a living stream would serve to protect and enhance these natural amenities in the Ventura River and Ojai Valleys which residents and visitors have traditionally enjoyed. Steps must be taken now, however, if the recreational and scenic values of the Ventura River are to be preserved for present and future generations.

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AUGUST HAHN WITH WINTER STEELHEAD, 1918.

JOE HOOKER, DON ROWE, AND VICTOR PEIRANO WITH WINTER STEELHEAD, TAKEN NEAR TICO CROSSING, 1920.

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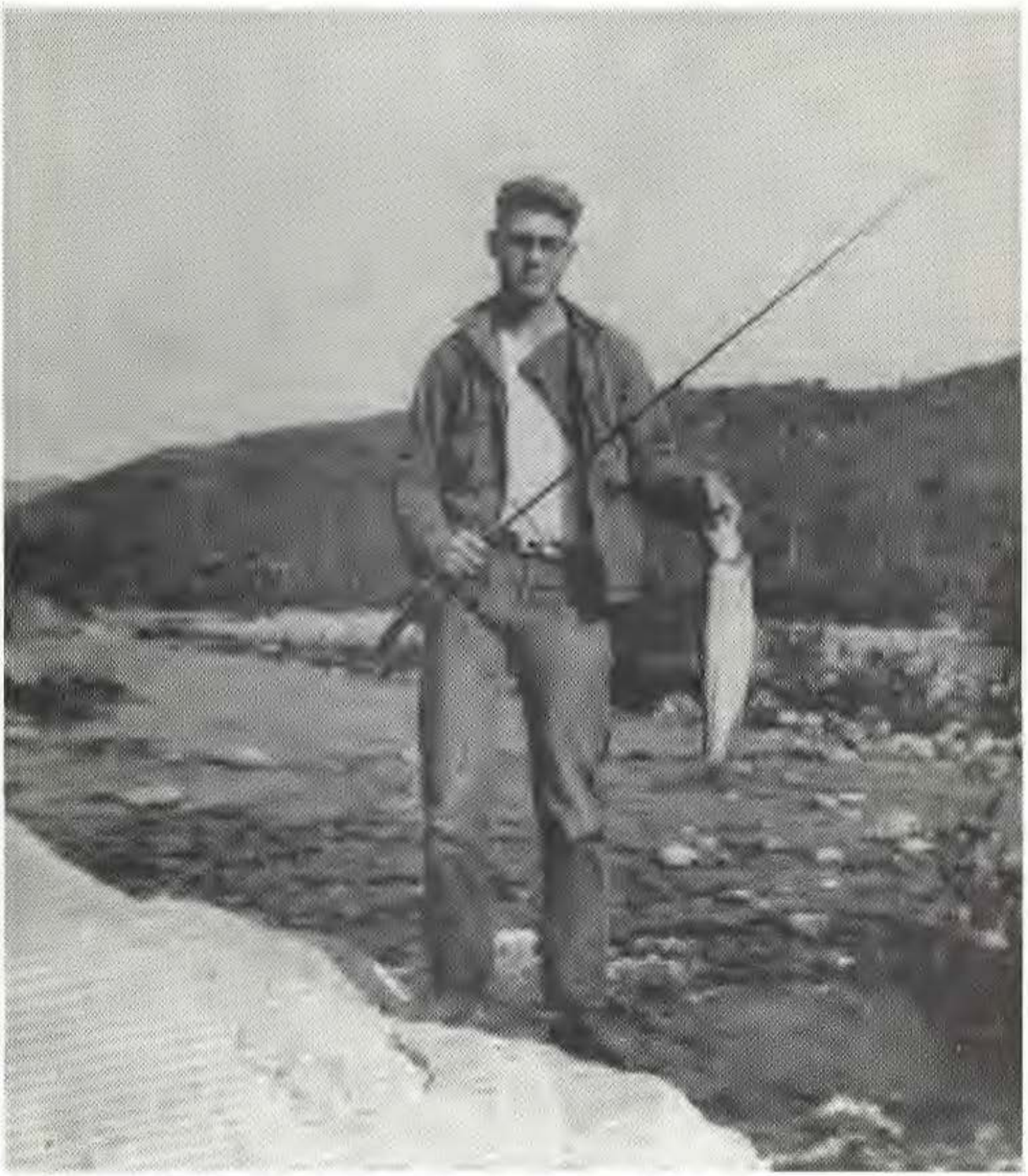
JOHN B. COLLA WITH WINTER STEELHEAD TAKEN BELOW FOSTER PARK, 1946.

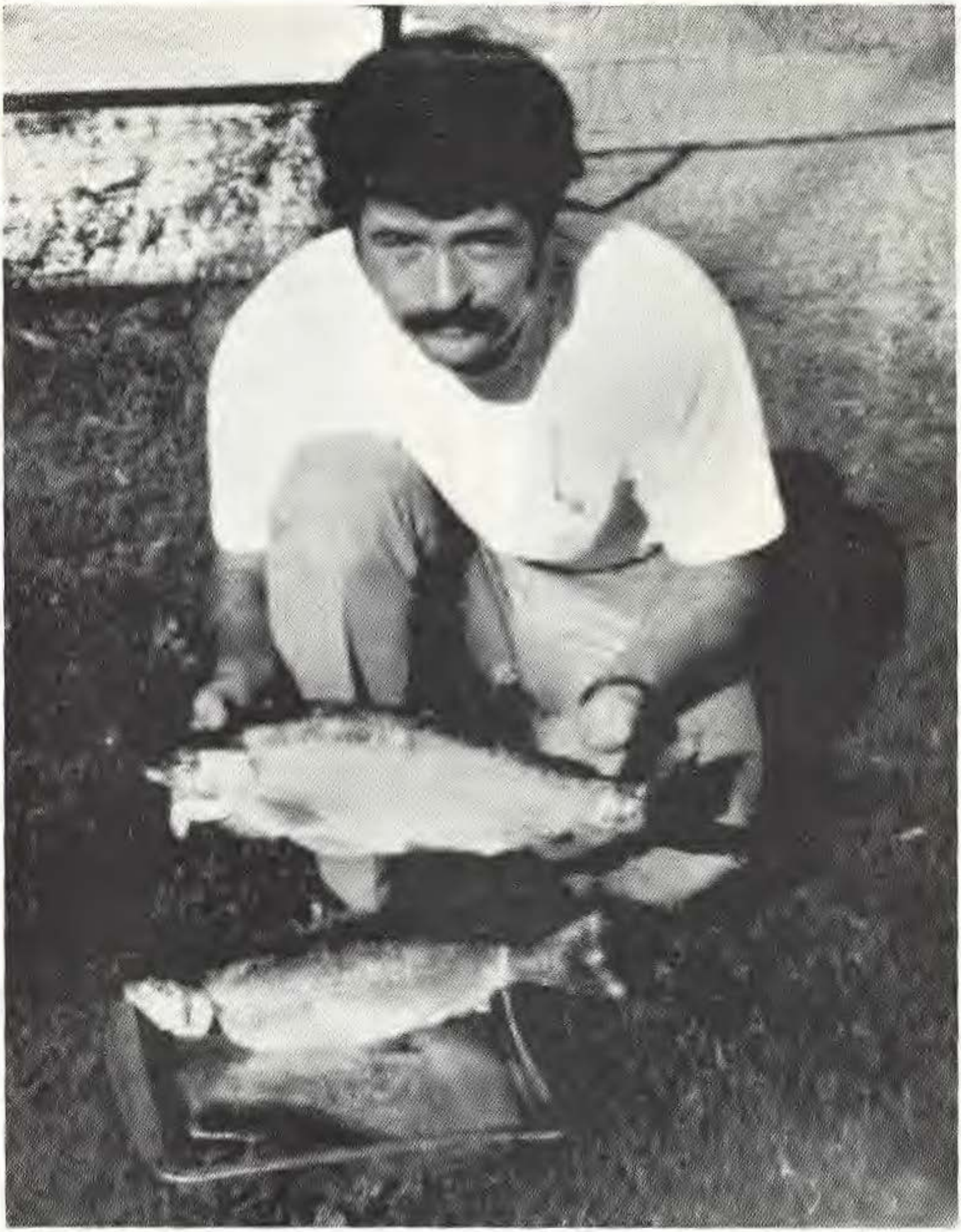
EDGAR HENKE WITH SPENT STEELHEAD TAKEN ABOVE THE FOSTER PARK BRIDGE, 1946.

E. E. BARNES WITH TWO YOUNG STEELHEAD TAKEN NEAR FOSTER PARK, 1948.

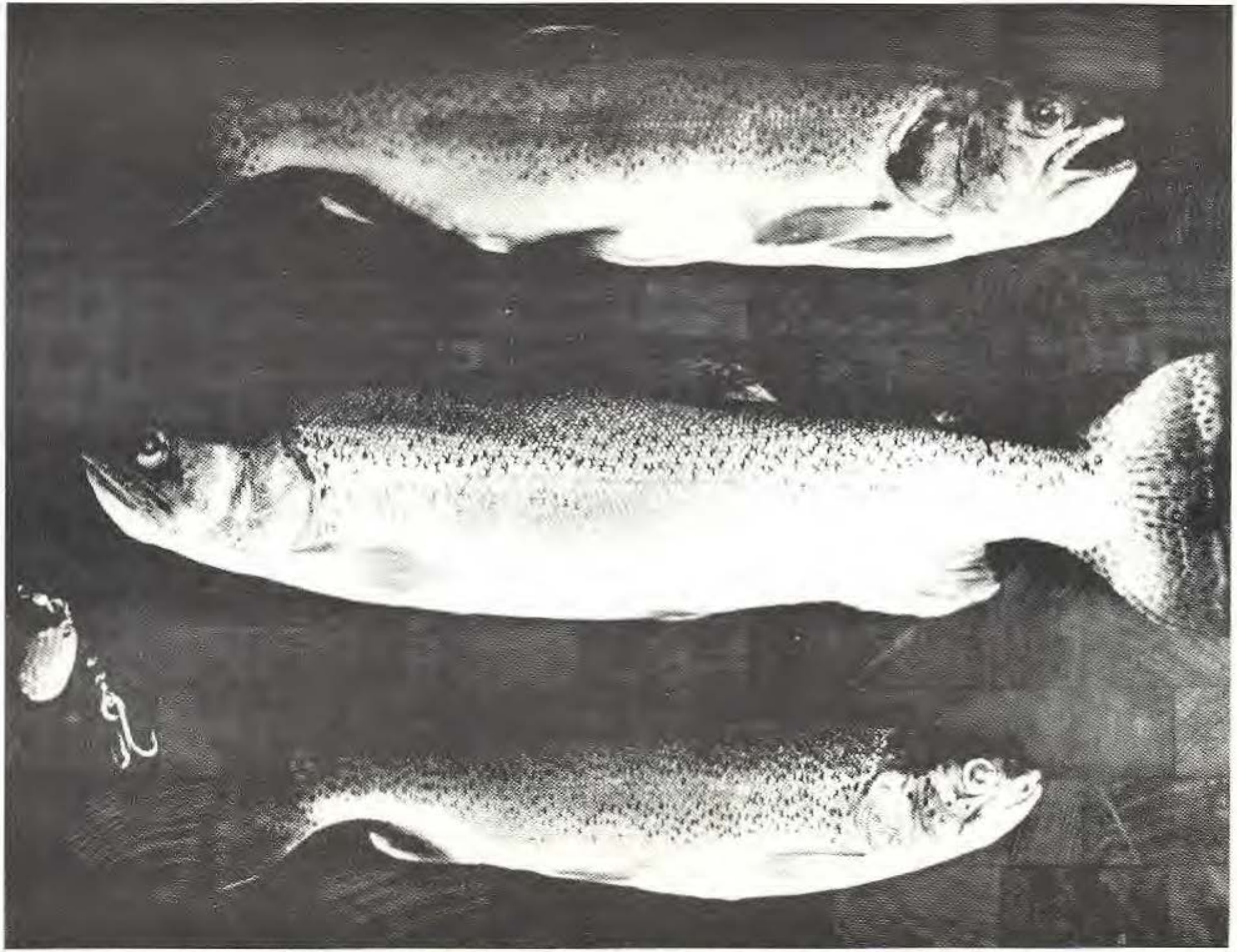
C. W. BUGG AND MILO BUGG WITH SPENT STEELHEAD AND RESIDENT TROUT TAKEN NEAR CASITAS SPRINGS, 1952.



BEN SMITH, JR. WITH FRESH RUN STEELHEAD TAKEN ABOVE THE SHELL HOLE, 1953.



ROBERT HOGAN WITH YOUNG STEELHEAD TAKEN NEAR CASITAS SPRINGS, 1969.



TROUT TAKEN FROM THE LOWER VENTURA RIVER, MARCH 1973. LARGEST FISH FOURTEEN INCHES.

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