

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

River parkways directly improve the quality of life in California by providing important recreational, open space, wildlife, flood management, water quality, and urban waterfront revitalization benefits to communities in the state.

California River Parkway Act of 2004
California Public Resources Code §5751(a)

CHAPTER 1: ELEMENTS



Overview

PURPOSE

This Vision Plan is a conceptual plan, intended to promote a vision for a parkway on the Lower Ventura River, located in Ventura County, California. The proposed Lower Ventura River Parkway is approximately six miles in length beginning at the Pacific Ocean and ending upstream at Foster Park. Following guidelines suggested by the Trust for Public Land and the Coastal Conservancy (CCC 2007), this plan uses stakeholder input, research, pictures, maps, sketches, and text to provide a conceptual idea for the Lower Ventura River Parkway.

GOAL

The project goal for this Vision Plan is to reconnect people with the Lower Ventura River by providing opportunities for recreation, education, and stewardship while protecting and enhancing hydrological and wildlife resources.

WHAT IS A RIVER PARKWAY?

The California River Parkway Act of 2004 and related legislation provides for the establishment of river parkways on lands along rivers or streams. The purposes of river parkways include the protection, improvement and restoration of riverine and riparian open space and wildlife habitat, the provision of opportunities to the public for recreation as well as awareness regarding the conservation

and restoration of rivers and streams, and the conversion of existing developed riverfront land uses into uses consistent with river parkways.

WHY THIS VISION PLAN

The Ventura River is a beautiful river and one of the last remaining wild rivers in Southern California. Much of the river runs through a thickly vegetated landscape seldom visited by people and is home to thousands of species of wildlife. Unlike most rivers in Southern California, the Ventura River is mostly untouched by the concrete channels and dense development that have degraded so many other rivers in the region.

The Ventura River Watershed still has large areas of intact, quality habitat. As a result, restoring impacted ecological systems would allow both Venturans and their visitors to reap a multitude of ecosystem services with greater ease and success than in the more heavily developed and densely populated areas of Southern California.

The Ventura River Valley is located within the California Floristic Province, one of the world's biodiversity hotspots: a rich but threatened reservoir of plants and animals found nowhere else in the world. Steep and rugged topography, a relatively low population count, and a national forest along the northern border have helped to preserve the diversity of biological resources within the Ventura River Watershed.

Despite the richness of its remaining habitat, the Ventura River Watershed has been heavily impacted by human activity. Today, the Ventura River is in a stage of transition; dam removal, increasing development, and a new movement towards watershed management are all pressures on the river. Meanwhile, many human activities such as agriculture, and industrial and urban development have not employed sustainable practices in their operations, resulting in loss or degradation to the ecosystems of the watershed. Contaminated runoff from urban, agricultural, and oil and mineral extraction sites enter the Ventura River untreated and little is done to curb these pollutant levels. These negative impacts led to an overall reduction of biodiversity that threatens the ecological health of the region.

Among other benefits discussed in this Vision Plan, river parkway projects are ideal for reconnecting people with rivers through a combination of improved access, passive recreational opportunities, and education. The people of Ventura have experienced a profound degree of separation from this river in the last half-century. This Vision Plan is about ending that separation.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This Vision Plan is divided into five sections. *Part 1: Introduction* describes the historical and planning context for the parkway concept. *Part 2: Inventory and Analysis* provides an understanding of the geological, hydrological,

[FACING PAGE] FIGURE 1.1 *Traveling along the Main Street Bridge.*

The authors hope that this Vision Plan can be used as a guide in overcoming the many challenges that lie ahead in the planning and execution of a parkway. The rich and unique character of Ventura's resources, both cultural and natural, have provided the most important questions and many potential solutions in this effort.

This proposed parkway for the Lower Ventura River is located in Southern California, in Ventura County, in the watershed of the Ventura River. The project site spans the southernmost six miles along the main stem of the Ventura River, encompassing areas under either Ventura County or the city of San Buenaventura jurisdiction. The northern tip of the project site begins at Foster Park and continues south, concluding at the Ventura River Estuary. Though this Vision Plan focuses on this six mile segment, planning and

PLANNING SCALES

This Vision Plan has determined three scales at which to plan for the Ventura River project area: the regional scale based on the jurisdictional boundary of Ventura County; the watershed scale, based on the Ventura River Watershed; and the project area scale, based on the Lower Ventura River segment as identified by The Trust for Public Land.

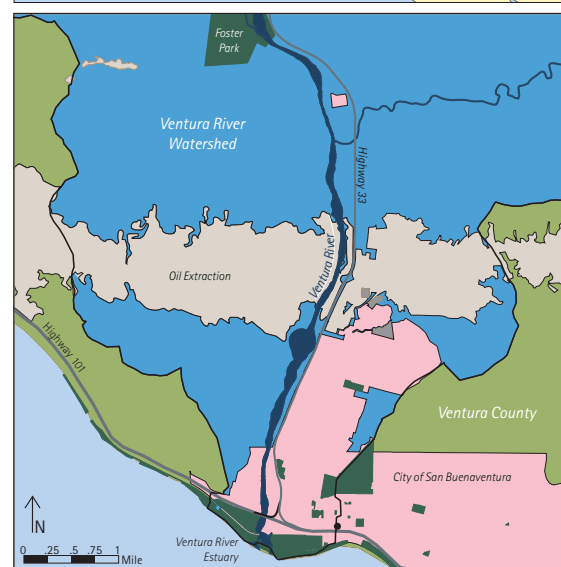


FIGURE 1.2 *The locational context of the Ventura River Watershed and the Lower Ventura River. Data from ESRI; City of San Buenaventura.*

Planning and Policy Context

EXISTING POLICIES

The Ventura River Watershed is located almost entirely within the County of Ventura and the lowest six miles of its primary waterway runs through the jurisdictions of both the city and County of Ventura. The character of the Ventura River, both in its natural and developed aspects, is in part a reflection of policies of these local governments as well as those of the State of California, and they have created a favorable environment for the emerging parkway concept. The policies discussed below have focused on three objectives: limits on urban growth, the preservation of agricultural and open space resources, and the preservation and enhancement of water as a resource.

A regulatory framework for achieving these objectives at the state and county level began to develop in 1963, when concern over the irregular boundaries forming within rapidly expanding urban areas led the California Legislature to establish quasi-legislative bodies known as Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCO). LAFCOs are charged with controlling the boundaries of cities and special districts (Ventura LAFCO 2003). Two years later, the Ventura County LAFCO proposed the forming of special districts known as greenbelts (Ventura County Star 2004). These districts are protected by policy statements in which the county pledges not to permit any development that is not agricultural or open space; at the same time, cities promise not to annex these areas (Ventura LAFCO 2003). The first such greenbelt

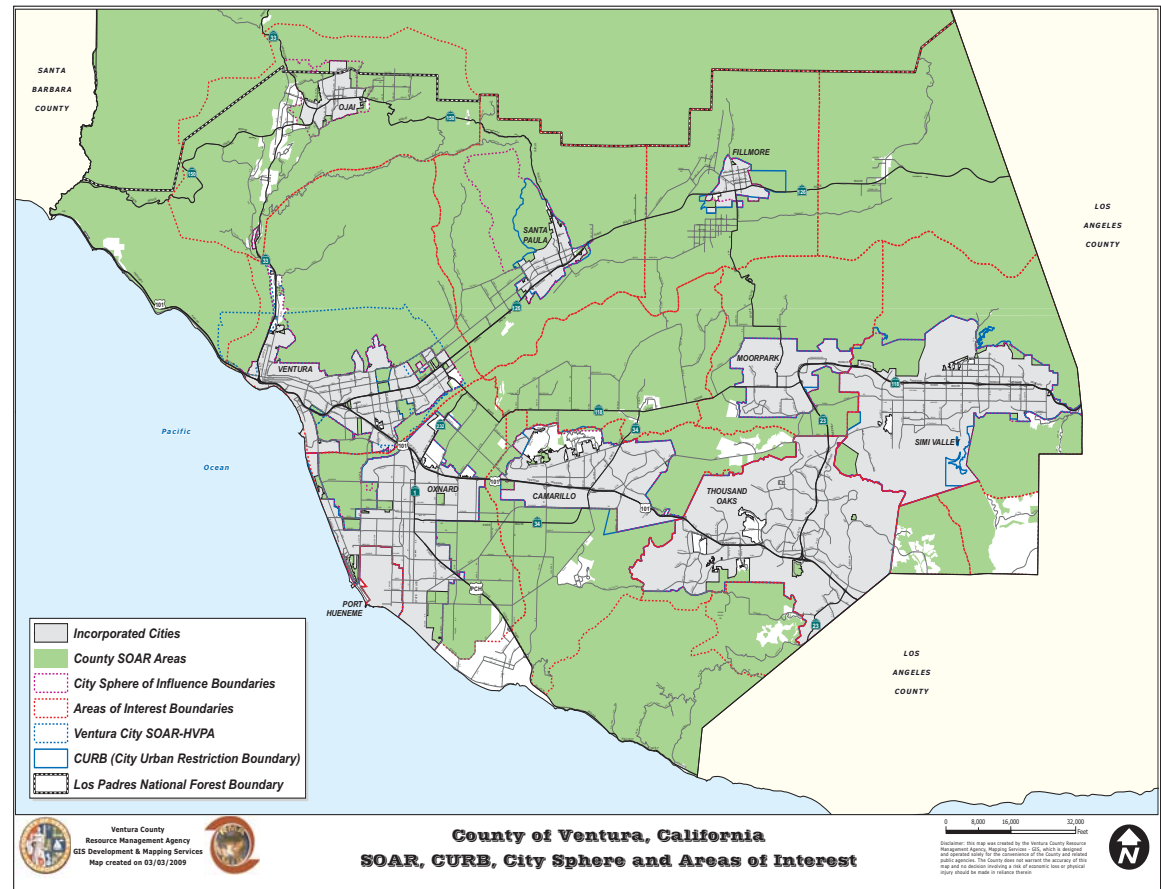


FIGURE 1.3 Guidelines for Orderly Development and SOAR areas. Produced by: Ventura County, Resource Management Agency, GIS Development and Mapping Services. Ventura County Resource Management Agency.

was established in 1967 by the Cities of Santa Paula and Ventura in conjunction with the County.

Ventura County followed up the greenbelt concept in 1969 with the establishment of Guidelines for Orderly Development (Ventura LAFCO 2003). The only regulations of their type in California (Ventura LAFCO 2003), these provide that development should in general occur within the boundaries of incorporated cities (Ventura County 2006). They have the effect of preventing the county from developing in unincorporated areas while requiring cities to annex any area outside their boundaries that they wish to develop (Ventura LAFCO 2003). Further, they delineate the areas within which each city may potentially annex land.

Figure 1.3, taken from the Ventura County General Plan, shows two types of boundaries included in Guidelines for Orderly Development that clarify which governing bodies are responsible for a given geographic region. Areas of interest (shown in red), are defined partly by topography and community identity. Each of these areas is influenced by one incorporated city although each also includes unincorporated county land; they have the effect of encouraging the county to focus on regional rather than local functions. Spheres of influence (shown in magenta) show the anticipated future boundaries of cities, including areas currently unincorporated; any expansion of services in unincorporated areas within a sphere of influence is taken

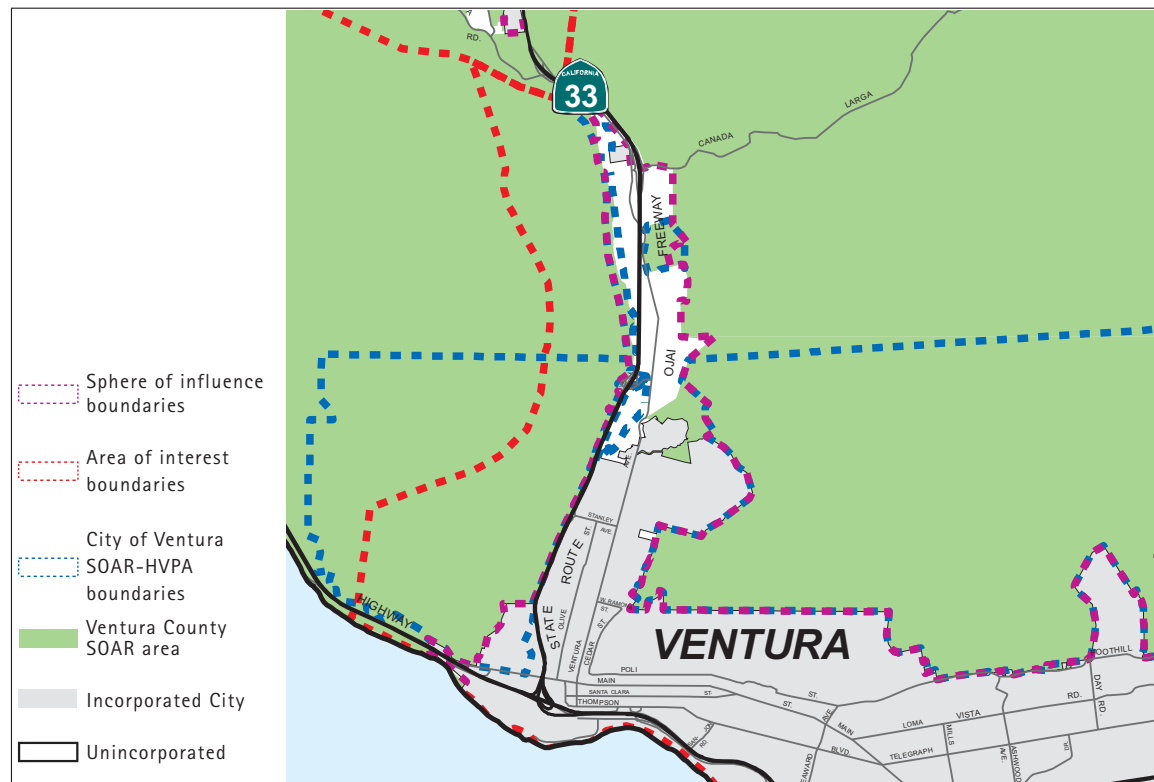


FIGURE 1.4 This zoomed in view of the diagram in Figure 1.3 illustrates the extensive, yet incomplete, development restrictions currently in place in the proposed parkway corridor. The area in white is unincorporated county and falls within the City of Ventura's Sphere of Influence, but on close examination is not encompassed by the city's SOAR-HVPA boundary, which is represented by the dashed blue line. Produced by: Ventura County, Resource Management Agency, GIS Development and Mapping Services. Ventura County Resource Management Agency.

on by the applicable city as part of a process of annexation (Ventura LAFCO 2003, Ventura County 2006).

Guidelines for Orderly Development and Ventura County Greenbelts provided context for the next major policy initiative, SOAR, an acronym for Save Our Agricultural Resources in the city of Ventura and for Save Openspace and Agricultural Resources at the county level (Ventura County Star 2004). SOAR measures, by establishing areas that are precluded from development except through voter approval, tend to discourage development outside of urban boundaries. The first SOAR measure was passed in 1995 by voter initiative in the city of Ventura (VC Star 2004). The county's SOAR measure passed three years later and is set to expire in 2020. Seven other cities Ventura County cities also passed SOAR measures between 1998 and 2000 (Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County (WCVC) 2006). Figure 1.4 illustrates that almost half of the proposed parkway corridor, the project site, is currently protected from development by SOAR, but the legislation will expire in 2030 unless extended (City of Ventura General Plan 2008).

Figure 1.4 (a zoomed-in portion of figure 1.3) shows how the combination of areas of interest, spheres of influence, SOAR, and a third measure, the Hillsides Voter Participation Act (HVPA) impact on the proposed Lower Ventura River Parkway corridor. Most of the east side of the proposed parkway corridor is either within the City of Ventura or

within its sphere of influence; the North Avenues area (shown in white) is likely to be annexed by the city in the future. The west bank of the river and the hillsides above have overlapping coverage by city and county SOAR areas, but SOAR and HVPA narrowly miss most of the land within the city's sphere of influence. Taken as a whole, the map shows that a significant portion of the parkway corridor is slated for future annexation, and not protected from development by SOAR or HVPA. Furthermore, SOAR measures will expire unless extended by voters.

Despite incomplete coverage of the lower river, SOAR and HVPA are significant for the future of the proposed parkway. The implementation of HVPA has already led to the formation of a crucial stakeholder group, the Ventura Hillsides Conservancy. And, if voters continue to support HVPA, the measure will help to ensure that hillside developments do not negatively impact on the Lower Ventura River by introducing sediment and pollutants into the river.

Proposition 50

A state policy initiative has led to increased focus on river systems and on natural water resources, with a significant potential impact on the future of the Lower Ventura River. In 2002, California voters passed Proposition 50, the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002, with the stated purpose of

protecting the state's water supply (CA Resources Agency 2007). The act authorized the issuance of general obligation bonds to provide funding to thirteen state departments for projects that include the maintenance of water infrastructure, coordination of water management and the enhancement of natural water resources (CA Resources Agency 2006).

The most significant provisions of Proposition 50 for this Vision Plan are those which authorized the Legislature to appropriate one hundred million dollars in funding for river parkway projects (CA Resources Agency 2007). Such projects are aimed at:

- providing opportunities for recreation, including trails along rivers and streams
- protecting and improving riverine or riparian habitat
- flood management through the maintenance or restoration of open space along rivers and streams
- conversion of existing developed riverfront land to parkway use
- facilities to support or interpret river or stream restoration and other conservation activities

In order to be eligible, proposed projects must meet at least two of the above-stated purposes (CA Resources Agency 2007). With the California River Parkways Act of 2004, the Legislature further implemented this program by establishing the California River Parkways Program under

the State Resources Agency. During the fiscal years ending in June 2006, 2007, and 2008, the agency has conducted three rounds of grant funding, awarding a total of over ninety-one million dollars for ninety-two parkway projects. These projects, when completed, will create 139 miles of trail and acquire or develop 7,564 acres of habitat for restoration. Proposition 84, approved by California voters in 2007, provides for sixty-six million dollars in additional funding that will be awarded over three years starting with

the fiscal year ending June 2009 (CA Resources Agency 2006, 2007, 2008).

Proposition 50 also authorized the appropriation of funds for planning grants to local governments for the preparation of Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Plans. In 2002, twenty-seven water-related agencies in Ventura County formed a coalition that was successful in obtaining funds for a county-wide IRWM Plan – in

essence, a watershed plan for the three major watersheds in the County. This effort led in 2006 to the formation of the Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County (WCVC) and the outset of ongoing watershed planning for the Ventura River Watershed (see Existing Plans, below) (WCVC 2006).

EXISTING PLANS AND PROJECTS

In addition to the policy and legislation framework, numerous plans exist that will affect the future of the

MATILIJA DAM ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT

The future of the Ventura River and watershed policy for the United States has been changed by an initiative that originated with non-governmental organizations and individual environmental activists in the Ventura Watershed. In the late 1990s, eight organizations including the Ventura County chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, the Friends of the Ventura River, and the Environmental Coalition of Ventura County, joined with individuals to form the Matilija Coalition for the purpose of promoting the ecological restoration of the Ventura River Watershed. The coalition's initial goal was to press for the removal of Matilija Dam in order to assist the return of steelhead trout to the watershed above the dam and to restore the natural sand supply to Ventura's beaches (Matilija Coalition 2008a). The coalition eventually included more than twenty-five organizations representing river restorationists, fly fisherman, whitewater enthusiasts, and wilderness preservationists, as well as corporate sponsors (Matilija Coalition 2008b).

Initiatives for the removal of the dam began at least as early as the 1970s, when Ed Henke, a lifelong Ventura resident and former steelhead trout fisherman on the river, individually lobbied many public organizations for restoration of the river to pre-dam conditions; Henke eventually formed the Friends of the Ventura River (Gustkey 1985). By 1999, the city and County of Ventura as well as a host of other governmental organizations had endorsed the idea (Jenkin 2002).

In 2001, after many years of discussion and planning, these efforts resulted in a cost-

sharing agreement between the county and the United States Army Corps of Engineers for the Matilija Dam Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study (Jenkin 2002), and in funding for further plans and studies under Proposition 50 (discussed under Existing Policies, above). Finally, in September 2007, Congress approved (but did not appropriate) \$143 million in funding (Collins 2007) for what will soon be the largest dam removal to date (Jenkin 2002), as part of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007. The dam removal project is currently in its design phase.

The Matilija project is the joint effort of many agencies under the auspices of the Ventura County Watershed Protection District. The project includes another feature of particular relevance to the Lower Ventura River: a program for the eradication of *Arundo donax* and other invasive plant species from the river. Eradication attempts have already begun in the upper watershed, with impacts that will eventually reach the lower river in the proposed parkway zone (VCWPD 2006).

These two efforts are interdependent. Dam removal will help to restore sediment balance in the river, restore some sand to the beaches downstream, and will restore the passage of steelhead trout into critical upstream spawning areas. However, the passage of steelhead trout and the movement of sediment in the river are also partly dependent upon removing the physical barrier imposed by *Arundo donax* and ensuring proper river flow by regulating surface water diversion and groundwater pumping.

Ventura River Watershed and provide context for the development of a plan for the Lower Ventura River Parkway. The first of these, the General Plans for Ventura County and the city of Ventura, has the broadest reach, encompassing land use planning around the proposed parkway area but also far beyond. A second category of plans, consisting of the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan and the Matilija Dam Ecosystem Restoration Project, address aspects of the Ventura River Watershed related to water resources and riverine and riparian habitat. A third category, including the Ventura River Estuary Enhancement Plan, the Ventura River Trail project, and the 1994 Biological Assessment, directly address habitat restoration and public access within the proposed parkway area. Finally, the last category consists of urban development plans that specifically address communities adjacent to the proposed parkway area.

General Plans

The Ventura County General Plan and the city of San Buenaventura 2005 General Plan both address future plans for growth and development in accordance with California law that requires that all local governments have a plan to guide development over a twenty year time span. Both plans have specific goals for the preservation and management of natural resources, goals that are in keeping with the concept of a parkway on the Lower Ventura River:

Protecting Ventura's fragile natural resources is a fundamental focus of the 2005 Ventura General Plan. Policies and actions in this chapter intend to ensure that coastal, hillside, and watershed features are preserved, remain visible and accessible, and demarcate boundaries for urban development to define and enhance the city's identity (City Of San Buenaventura 2005).

Watershed Planning

Watershed-based planning is based upon the concept, developed through the work of naturalist Aldo Leopold, poet Gary Snyder and many others, that an ecologically-sustainable human culture requires resource management based on planning units that cross traditional political boundary lines to encompass areas with common water drainages and ecological communities. Watershed-based planning, given formal support through Proposition 50, has the potential to improve resource allocation and water quality by giving decision makers both the authority and the responsibility to consider both the sources (headwaters) and the downstream areas of the waters impacted by their policies. The IRWM Plan in its latest version effective 2006 is a comprehensive look at the three major watersheds of Ventura County, with the goals of conserving and enhancing water supply, improving water quality, reducing injury and damage from flooding, protecting and enhancement of habitat and ecosystems and improvement of public recreation, access and education regarding water resources (Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County 2006). One critical component of the plan for the Ventura River Watershed incorporated into the IRWM Plan is the Matilija Dam Ecosystem Restoration Project, described in the sidebar in this section.

Project Area Plans and Projects

The Ventura River Estuary Enhancement and Management Final Plan (1994) is an assessment of habitat and a plan for improved public access to the estuary and surrounding wetlands at the mouth of the Ventura River. It includes proposals for the reconfiguring of the railroad trestle at the river mouth to allow river flow and sediment transport to occur more naturally, and for a system of carefully designed

trails that would allow better visitor access to the estuary while respecting its sensitive habitat and private property.

The Ventura River Trail, constructed in 1999, was a first step in providing improved public recreational access near the Lower Ventura River. With the trail being located primarily on a former railroad right of way separated from the river by a levee and highway, it provides no direct access, and very little visual access, to the river within the six miles of the parkway corridor. Nevertheless, the trail has provided many cyclists, and the occasional walker, with a much more intimate familiarity with the urban and industrial communities along the lower river, and at Foster County Park it connects with the Ojai Valley Trail, connecting the proposed parkway area with upstream areas of the watershed.

The separation between the River Trail and the river itself is partly the result of implementation of many of the recommendations of the Biological Assessment for the trail, prepared in 1994. In consideration of the sensitivity of riverine habitat, the consulting biologist recommended measures specifically to keep trail users away from the Lower Ventura River. Partly, this resulted from initial proposals for equestrian use of the trail downstream from Shell Road (Hunt 1994b). However, this general concern for the impact of human visitors on ecosystems in the river floodway significantly affects the ideas presented in this Vision Plan.

Finally, with much of the proposed parkway area within the sphere of influence of the city of Ventura, the urban planning and economic development plans of the city will have an impact on the development of a parkway.

The Economic Development Strategy 2005-2010 (EDS), prepared by the city of Ventura's Economic Development and Revitalization Division, identifies six focus areas for economic development within the city. Notably, three of those communities – Downtown, Westside and North Avenue – are partially or wholly adjacent to the proposed parkway area. The focus on revitalization for the riverside areas of the city is reflected in the city's General Plan and in the Specific Plans for those communities. These areas are discussed more fully in chapter 5, Cultural Elements.

Downtown and Westside

The focus of the EDS and the city's Specific Plan (March 2007) on revitalization is accompanied by a concern for preservation and celebration of the unique historic resources of the historic downtown core that dates back to the founding of the Mission of San Buenaventura in 1782. The emphasis on historic features is an important factor in envisioning concepts for connecting downtown to the proposed river parkway.

The communities of Westside and North Avenue have particular relevance for the parkway concept because both of these residential/industrial neighborhoods extend to the east bank of the Ventura River within the project area. The Westside community, part of the city of Ventura, lies along the river immediately upstream from the historic downtown area, and is further discussed in chapter 12 of this Vision Plan. North Avenue is unincorporated but within the city's sphere of influence; it lies further upstream, adjacent to the Canada Confluence site envisioned in chapter 10. Since 1998 both of these communities have been the subject of an ongoing discussion in the city regarding revitalization.

The 1999 Westside Urban Design Plan advocates the greening of city streets in that neighborhood, while the 2002 Westside Revitalization Plan calls for mixed-use developments. No Specific Plan has been developed by the city for this neighborhood. With regard to North Avenue, a notable feature of the EDS is its recommendation for City annexation of this community.

One goal that emerges from these plans with regard to both the Downtown and Westside communities is the remediation and redevelopment of brownfield properties, a subject further discussed in chapter 10. An example of the issues that this poses for the proposed river parkway is found in the recommendation of the EDS for the redevelopment of a highly visible brownfield site in the North Avenue area into an urban village that will function as an economic driver for the city. The proposed site has aging infrastructure, is likely to be contaminated, has a high risk of flooding, is on land that appears to have been part of the riverbed before development and is located at the confluence of the river and one of its tributaries. As discussed in Part 3, Design, these factors may argue for permanent open space with passive recreational opportunities rather than urban development.

Students in the City and Regional Planning Department at California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo carried these development proposals forward to a more advanced stage of visualization with their comprehensive urban design, *Ventura Avenue to the Future*, in 2002. Of the plans discussed above, only this one acknowledges the existence of the Ventura River just footsteps away from Westside and North Avenue. With that exception, the plans discussed above have an emphasis on redevelopment

that reflects the economic priorities of residents of these urban areas, but fall short of the spirit of the General Plan by omitting any consideration of the ecosystem services provided to those communities by the nearby Ventura River, and the role that the river should play in the future of those communities.

Conclusion

The policies, plans and projects discussed above provide a context for approaching the river parkway concept that is philosophically supportive. Many of their goals, such as river restoration, water conservation, improved public access, limits on growth and revitalization of riverside communities, are consistent with the purposes of river parkways expressed by the Legislature in Proposition 50. However, these initiatives will not eliminate several of the greatest threats to the Lower Ventura River without additional input. One of those threats occurs with every glass of water that a watershed resident drinks and every toilet flushed, since those daily actions contribute to the removal of flow from the river and from its groundwater supplies. Another threat is the existing potential for piecemeal development of property along the riverside. Hence, this Vision Plan envisions a river parkway as an essential next step in order to tie together all of the protections afforded by activists and regulators in the past into an integrated plan for the future of the lower river itself.

History

SETTLEMENT

This Vision Plan has the goal of strengthening the relationship between people and the Ventura River. As long as people have lived on the coast of what is now Ventura County, they have had a relationship with the river, but that relationship has changed many times, and in each instance, the change has had an impact on the river itself. An understanding of these changes provides an important context for the re-envisioning of the Lower Ventura River and the planning of the parkway.

First Dwellers

Evidence exists of the occupation on Santa Rosa Island by humans as early as thirteen thousand years ago. Ancestors of the people who are now commonly called Chumash probably lived on the Channel Islands and the mainland by nine thousand years ago (Timbrook 2007).

People had every reason to settle in this locale. An abundant variety of ecosystem resources providing food, medicine, tools, building materials, and ritual objects – was available to the coastal Chumash. Chaparral covered hills rose sharply to 3,500 feet in elevation within several miles of the coast. Hillside streams flowed into a broad river valley and then into lagoons and wetlands. Northern and southern ocean waters met in what is now the Santa Barbara Channel, producing an upwelling of nutrient-rich water and supporting rich marine life (Timbrook 2007).

THREE PLANTS: EXAMPLES OF DEPENDENCE ON THE RIVER

Tule, also called Bulrush (*Scirpus* ssp.) grew thickly in the marsh at the mouth of the Ventura River, and also grew along streams in the watershed. Tule was the most common material used by Chumash for thatching houses and making mats. Ventureños tied together bundles of tule to construct light canoes designed for calm waters. One early twentieth century Ventureño, Simplicio Pico, described having seen these boats in the Ventura River estuary (Timbrook 2007). Red Willow (*Salix laevigata*) and Arroyo Willow (*Salix lasiolepis*) grew in riparian zones along rivers and streams. Red willow was the main construction material for Ventureño dwellings, and was the only firewood used for sweathouses, while arroyo willow had medicinal uses. Various rushes (*Juncus* ssp.) grew on the sand dunes at the mouth of the Ventura River and in riparian areas, and were the source material for both twined and coiled basketry (Timbrook 2007). An outstanding coiled *Juncus* basket (figure 1.5) is now displayed at the County of Ventura Museum; it is believed to have been made by Petra Pico, a Ventura Chumash woman, in about the year 1900 (Museum of Ventura County 2008).



FIGURE 1.5 *Juncus* basket circa 1900.

Approximately five hundred years ago, there were about twenty thousand people speaking various Chumash dialects, and they had one of the highest population densities in North America. Chumash lands were centered on the Santa Barbara Channel, and extended from Paso Robles to Malibu and from the Northern Channel Islands to the edge of the Great Central Valley, including much of what is today Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura Counties (Timbrook 2007). They were divided into distinct groups geographically and by language (Museum of Ventura County 2008).

The Spanish mission founders in 1782 found between 2,500 and 4,200 people who spoke a distinct dialect in at least thirty-five villages in the Ventura region – they called them Ventureños. One of the largest Chumash villages, Shishalop (“in the mud”), was located near the mouth of the Ventura River in present-day Ventura (Museum of Ventura County 2008).

Chumash life was based on fishing, hunting and gathering wild plants (Timbrook 2007). The biodiversity of the Southern California coast served them in this regard; at least fifteen hundred species of plants were native to the region, and one contemporary researcher has identified more than one hundred and thirty of them that were used by Chumash (Timbrook 2007).

Spanish Settlers

The relationship of indigenous peoples to the land and their settlement of Shishalop near the mouth of the Ventura River, had an impact on the Spanish decision to locate a mission at the river mouth in 1782. Spanish settlers tended to locate their Missions and Pueblos near existing Native American villages, partly in order to exploit them as a source of labor (Rochlin 1999). The Spanish quickly employed the Ventura River as a lifeline to their settlement, and from 1792 to 1815, started the two-century-long process of “re-plumbing” the river by constructing a system of open

ditches and aqueducts to carry fresh water by gravity flow from a site near the confluence of Coyote Creek with the Ventura River (at present-day Foster Park, the northern end of the proposed parkway) to a cistern with charcoal filtration on the hill above the mission. More than two hundred years later, the city of San Buenaventura still draws some of its drinking water from the same approximate location. A portion of the water was diverted prior to that point and used, unfiltered, for crops, bathing, and washing (Museum of Ventura County 2008).

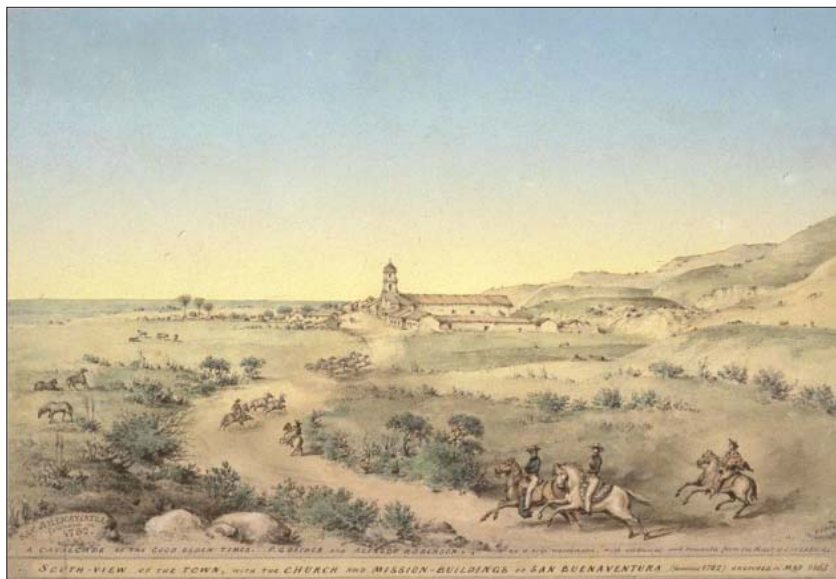


FIGURE 1.6 South view of the town, with the church and mission buildings of San Buenaventura. Date: May 1865. Source: The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Farmers

In the mid-1860s, several decades after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded California to the United States, the combination of a Ventura River flood followed by years of drought devastated the Spanish ranching economy in the area. The communal agricultural style of the ranchos began to give way to intensive, market-based family farms owned by immigrants from the American East, Midwest, and Europe who began growing wheat and barley (Museum of Ventura County 2008). Later, orchards of apricots, walnuts, avocados, and citrus became a feature of the Ventura River Valley. At first, ranches and farms grew crops well-suited to the arid region and employed a limited amount of surface water from the Ventura River. By the late 1800s, however, both agriculture and residential growth taxed water supplies. Farmers turned increasingly to pumping well water from the aquifers of the watershed, and numerous small water companies sprang up (Museum of Ventura County 2008).

Emergence of San Buenaventura as a City, E.P. Foster, and the Embrace of the River as a Cultural Asset

During the second half of the nineteenth century, San Buenaventura grew from a small mission settlement to a thriving commercial center, assisted by the arrival of the Southern Pacific railroad in 1887 and the establishment of the County of Ventura (with San Buenaventura as its county seat) in 1879 (Museum of Ventura County 2008).

Where prosperity and stature increased, “good works” for the betterment of the city were sure to follow. One problem to be solved was the inconvenience experienced by coastal travelers to and from the north, who had to wait for low tide to ford the Ventura River. On July 4, 1913, an Independence Day parade marched down Main Street and across the new Ventura River Bridge, celebrating the opening of a new, convenient connection with the city of Santa Barbara to the north.



FIGURE 1.7 Picnic in Seaside Park, 1928. The two “bookends” of the proposed parkway corridor, Seaside Park at the river mouth and Foster County Park upstream, were popular for civic events such as this. Photo: Ventura County Star; Museum of Ventura County.

One prominent philanthropist, E. P. Foster, and his family attempted to redefine the city's relationship with the Lower Ventura River by calling attention to the value of the river and its environs as a beautiful natural asset. In 1909, Foster donated land for what is now Seaside Wilderness Park and Emma Woods State Park at the mouth of the Ventura River to Ventura County. (In 1969 Seaside Wilderness Park was given by Ventura County to the city of San Buenaventura.) Local tradition holds that Foster planted Monterrey pine trees (*Pinus radiata*) in an effort to beautify the coastal marsh; several of the struggling trees remain today.

In the early 1900s, Foster effectively bracketed the present-day parkway concept with cultural assets by donating what is now Foster County Park on the Ventura River, six miles from the estuary. The Park entrance was adorned with carved stone lions, and later, a depression-era public amphitheater built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). In addition to these notable contributions, E.P. Foster was the first chairman of the Forestry Service, built San Buenaventura City Hall, the city's first library and hospital, and strongly supported his wife in the championship of women's rights.

Oil

The Lower Ventura River Valley was redefined as an economic resource in 1914 when Ralph Lloyd converted his family's ranchland and established the Ventura Avenue oil field. Within a few years, the Shell Oil Company purchased 13,000 acres from Lloyd, and the company's improved drilling methods produced a large oil strike in 1925. By 1950, Ventura Avenue was one of the highest producing oil fields in the United States (Museum of Ventura County 2008).

Oil production eventually impinged on sections of both the east and west banks of the Lower Ventura River channel, and resulted in the establishment of an industrial zone and a residential community for oil workers in an active flood zone on the eastern side of the river valley. Production on Ventura Avenue peaked in 1954, and a steady decline



since that time in the production of land-based Ventura County oil wells led the major oil companies to shift to offshore and international production, although smaller oil companies continue to drill in Ventura County using more efficient technologies (Museum of Ventura County 2008).

Oil production and the likelihood of associated soil and water contamination from related industries eventually led to the public's perception of sections of West Ventura as brownfield areas.

The growth of Ventura Avenue and the river valley as an industrial asset coincided with the era of hydraulic engineering by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers. In 1947, the Bureau completed the Matilija Dam sixteen miles upstream from the river mouth. The following year, the Army Corps effectively walled off the Ventura River from the city of Ventura by building the flood-control levee that constrains the lower 2.6 miles of the Ventura River. The river, however, was still a destination of choice for many Ventura residents.

FIGURE 1.8 View of the Ventura Avenue oil field, 1935. Photo: Ventura County Star; Museum of Ventura County.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THIS VISION PLAN

The relationship between people and the river has changed over time, and each change has reflected the course of Ventura County and Southern California. Once, the relationship was an intimate one, of people living at the river mouth, drawing their life and sustenance from the resources of the river and the sea, and celebrating their unity with the land as a religious tradition and an organic fact of life. Later, the relationship was primarily exploitative — using the river's water as the basis for settlement and agriculture — but people still lived at the side of the river or traveled to it, acknowledged it as an important feature of the land, and celebrated it. Later still, Venturans walled themselves off from the river in order to protect their city from its floods, and increasingly came to view it merely as an adjunct to (or an impediment to) industrial land uses in the river valley, a convenient but unseen water tap, and a receiving body for wastes. Eventually, many Venturans practically forgot that the river was there. Today, re-connection has become a priority, providing the context for this Vision Plan.



FIGURE 1.9 Ventura River steelhead trout, 1946. Photo: Tortilla Flats Project.

"River parkways provide communities with safe places for recreation including family picnics; bicycling and hiking; areas for river access for swimming, canoeing, and fishing; and many other activities."

California River Parkway Act of 2004: California Public Resources Code §5751(b)