

Issues & Insights

Ventura County's
supply of water news



Supporting Water and Wildlife with a Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan

United Water Conservation District (UWCD) recognizes the importance of balancing vital water resources management with local habitat conservation needs. That is why the District is developing a Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP or HCP) in accordance with Section 10 of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) to renovate the fish passage facility and support future operations at the Freeman Diversion.

A MSHCP allows UWCD to implement conservation measures that will minimize and mitigate effects of water resources management activities on eight protected species in the region. UWCD is working closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to develop an MSHCP, which would allow UWCD to carry out its lawful activities while conserving numerous species.

UWCD's MSHCP applies the best-available science and knowledge of local conditions to actively protect wildlife, while also reliably supplying 378,000 Ventura County residents and the region's large agriculture industry with water.



Least Bells Vireo

Species Proposed for Coverage Under the Habitat Conservation Plan

- Southern California Steelhead
- Tidewater Goby
- Least Bell's Vireo
- Southwestern Willow Flycatcher
- Pacific Lamprey
- Western Pond Turtle
- Two-Striped Garter Snake
- Western Yellow-Billed Cuckoo



Two-Striped
Garter Snake

Western Pond
Turtle



Current Fish Ladder

IMPROVING FACILITIES FOR FISH PASSAGE AT THE FREEMAN DIVERSION

Water diverted at the Freeman Diversion supports Ventura County residents, businesses, and the region's thriving agricultural industry. When approved, UWCD's MSHCP and associated Incidental Take Permits (ITP) will enable the District to continue to provide a sustainable water supply to the area while actively collaborating with the appropriate agencies to construct and operate an improved fish passage facility at the Freeman Diversion. Currently, a fish ladder operates at the facility.

Ultimately, UWCD aims to implement modifications to the facilities and current operations under an approved MSHCP to comply with the ESA and CESA while ensuring sufficient water remains available to manage groundwater aquifers and water demand on the Oxnard Plain.

AN INVESTMENT IN CONSERVATION

UWCD is committed to a long-term investment in the resources required to implement the MSHCP. UWCD plans to support the MSHCP through revenues it collects from its principal act in California Water Code, supplemented by grants and contributions from other organizations such as groundwater sustainability agencies. The operation and maintenance cost of the renovated Freeman Diversion facilities is estimated at approximately \$125 million (2024 dollars) over a 50-year permit term. The construction cost of a new fish facility and related supporting appurtenance will be funded from other sources (e.g., state and federal grant funding programs and appropriations).



The District is actively seeking funding from outside agencies, including the federal and state governments. Over the long and complex process of drafting the MSHCP, UWCD conducted extensive science-based studies and analysis. The District investigated the effects of the Freeman Diversion on habitat conditions in the Santa Clara River and conducted rigorous fish passage design and modeling evaluations. Feasibility of Freeman Diversion modifications and fish passage improvements were evaluated and a group of experts in the field engineering design, of water supply, resource management and habitat restoration supported UWCD in conducting the studies.



SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES

UWCD welcomes opportunities to connect with the community and discuss water supply, groundwater resources and current threats to our system. If you would like to book a presentation from one of our staff, please contact:

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GLOSSARY

Conservation: Preservation, protection, or restoration of the natural environment and wildlife.

Endangered Species Act (ESA): U.S. federal law that protects species threatened with extinction. The ESA establishes protections for threatened or endangered fish, wildlife and plants. An endangered species is defined as one in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range, while a threatened species is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

Fish Passage Facility: Structures that open aquatic travel routes that may be congested due to dams, culverts or diversions. This includes fish ladders, like the one installed at the Freeman Diversion Facility.

Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP or HCP): A comprehensive, long-term plan developed to address the needs of multiple species and the preservation of their habitats.

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