REPORT

DATE: November 3, 2005

TO: Regional Council

FROM: Daniel E. Griset, Senior Regional Planner, (213) 236-1895, griset@scag.ca.gov

SUBJECT: Matilija Dam Ecosystem Restoration

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S APPROVAL:

RECOMMENDATION:

Upon recommendation of the Energy and Environment Committee approve Resolution 05-468-1 supporting the Matilija Dam Restoration Project.

BACKGROUND:

The Matilija Dam Ecosystem Restoration Project is one of the most interesting environmental projects of its kind in the country. This uniqueness owes to the proposed removal of the Matilija Dam (originally constructed to a height of 198 feet), the largest dam demolition project proposed in the nation. Along with the dam removal the Project aims to restore the watershed hydrology and habitat that was critically compromised by the construction of the dam in 1947.

Working in conjunction with the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE), the WPD, as owner of Matilija Dam, is the sponsor of this $130 million project. Community and water agency support for this project has developed in recent years as public understanding of watershed issues has grown. Initially, however, the nature of the project sparked opposition from various Ventura County water agencies and flood control advocates. That opposition has diminished as the mitigation planning process has resolved concerns and fears. (The URL for the Project and the ACE Study is: http://www.matilijadam.org.)

General public support for the project has grown as stakeholders became increasingly aware of the nearly complete obsolescence and impairments of the Dam, a facility that was constructed originally to create storage for agricultural needs and to a lesser extent provide flood control benefits. Currently, however, the Dam reservoir has accumulated nearly 6 million cubic yards of debris and sediment, reducing its water storage by more than 93% of its original designed capacity (from about 7,000 acre feet to now about 400 acre feet). With current trends the Dam's reservoir is expected to lose its entire storage capacity and any of the few remaining flood control benefits by 2020. The drainage area behind the Dam is the Matilija Creek watershed with its 55 square miles, some 15 miles upstream from the Pacific Ocean and a tributary to the Ventura River.

The objectives of this restoration project include habitat restoration (improving aquatic and terrestrial habitat to benefit fish and wildlife species), hydrological restoration (restoring the river's hydrologic and sediment

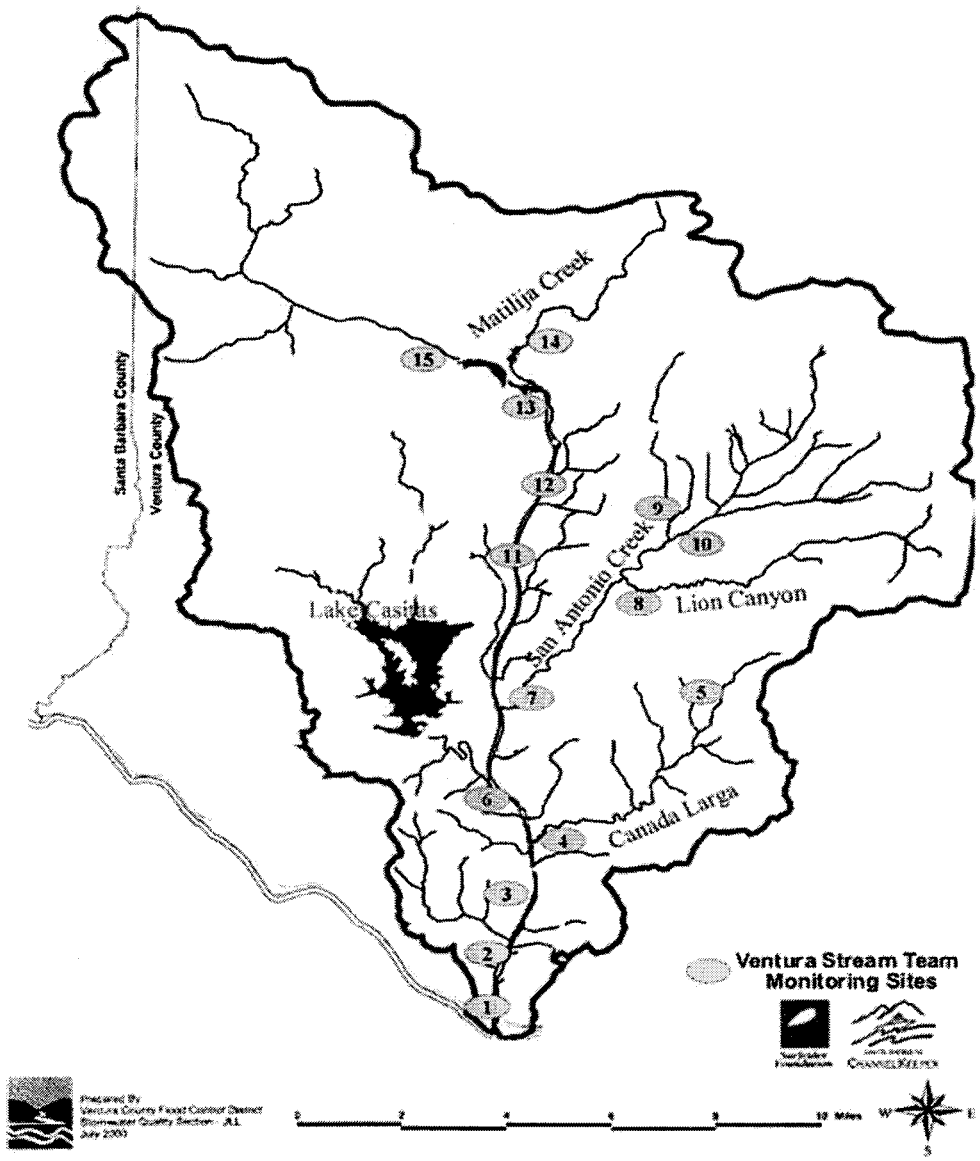
transport conditions to pre-dam conditions) and recreational amenities (returning the dam property to the US Forest Service to become an outdoor education and recreation site).

Though the County has approved the project's environmental studies and nearly $400,000 in federal funding has been approved, the next hurdle is funding for the project's design and engineering. The budget for this key implementation phase is about $6.5 million. The overall financial strategy for the project anticipates that local agencies will fund 35% of the project costs.

FISCAL IMPACT: All work related to the recommended staff action is contained within the adopted FY 05/06 budget under 06-075. Funding and implementation of this Project will be the fiscal responsibility of other entities.

DOCS #115111v1

Map of the Matilija Watershed:



RESOLUTION No. 05-468-1

**A RESOLUTION OF
THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS
IN SUPPORT OF
THE MATILIJA DAM ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT**

WHEREAS, Matilija Dam on Matilija Creek, the principle tributary of the Ventura River, was built in 1947 by the Ventura County Watershed Protection District to provide water for the Ojai and Ventura River Valleys, and as a limited flood control structure; and

WHEREAS, since 1947 the Matilija Dam reservoir has accumulated approximately 6 million cubic yards of sediment and debris, eliminating more than 90 percent of its original storage capacity; and

WHEREAS, Matilija Dam no longer provides significant water supply benefits; and

WHEREAS, Matilija Dam no longer provides flood control benefits to the people and properties downstream of the dam; and

WHEREAS, the functions of Matilija Dam have been replaced by the construction of Casitas Dam in 1958 by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and other downstream flood control measures; and

WHEREAS, restoration of Matilija Dam to serve its original purposes is neither financially feasible, technically sound, nor environmentally desirable; and

WHEREAS, the Ventura River once provided a significant habitat for a wide variety of native fish and wildlife, including the endangered steelhead trout and the threatened red-legged frog, which are part of the natural heritage of Ventura County; and

WHEREAS, prior to the construction of Matilija Dam, the flow of sediment from the Ventura River system naturally replenished the coastal beaches of Ventura County which support unique coastal habitats and important recreational opportunities; and

WHEREAS, removal of Matilija Dam enjoys the active support of all local governments, including the dam owner, the Ventura County Watershed Protection District, local residents, and a broad coalition of statewide and national stakeholder organizations; and

WHEREAS, local, state, and federal governmental agencies have investigated alternative approaches to the removal of Matilija Dam; and

WHEREAS, the timely removal of Matilija Dam would provide for the recovery of California's endangered and threatened fish and wildlife, the restoration of historic outdoor recreational opportunities, and the protection of hundreds of millions of dollars of coastal properties.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Regional Council of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) that SCAG does hereby support the timely removal of Matilija Dam.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that SCAG supports the use of public and private partnerships as a constructive method for the planning, funding and implementing of the Matilija Ecosystem Restoration Project.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that SCAG urges local, special, state and federal agencies to expedite the implementation of the Matilija Ecosystem Restoration Project.

APPROVED AND ADOPTED by the Regional Council of the Southern California Association of Governments at a regular meeting on this 3rd day of November, 2005.

_____
TONI YOUNG
President, SCAG
Councilmember, City of Port Hueneme

_____
Mark Pisano
Executive Director, SCAG

_____
Karen Tachiki
Chief Legal Counsel, SCAG

Doc # 113833
Griset 9-12-05