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Public Interest Coalition Secures Major Victory in the Fight Against Agricultural Pollution

Ventura / Los Angeles County Ag Order Becomes Final

Ventura, CA- A coalition of environmental and Native American public interest groups consisting of Wishtoyo Foundation, Wishtoyo's Ventura Coastkeeper Program, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, Los Angeles Waterkeeper, CAUSE (Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy), and Center for Food Safety (collectively, "Coalition") secured California's most protective regulations to curb agricultural pollution to streams, rivers, and wetlands in Ventura and Los Angeles counties. The new rules (known as the "Ag Order") were issued by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board and, on Wednesday June 15, 2016, became cemented in place for the next five years.

The Ventura/LA regional Ag Order contains new protections that are stronger than those contained in any other California permit regulating discharges of toxins from agricultural lands, including:

- enforceable water quality limits for wastewater discharges from farms;
- date-certain timelines for compliance with water quality standards for farmers;
- edge-of-field monitoring of discharges from individual farms to verify compliance with water quality standards; and
- well testing requirements to protect rural farm workers from drinking contaminated water.

California law requires farmers comply with Ag Orders issued by Regional Water Boards, which are supposed to ensure that Clean Water Act water quality standards are being met. Prior versions of the Ag Order for Ventura and Los Angeles counties have been in place for 10 years, yet farmers have generally been unable to achieve water quality standards or even demonstrate that they are on track to do so. The Coalition argued that the prior Ag Order, therefore, failed to comply with state law. By including the stronger protections advocated by the Coalition, the new Ag Order is largely an affirmation of the Coalition's position that provision of a healthy environment, safe and healthy food and drinking water, protections for farm workers, and a vibrant agricultural sector can and should be mutually attainable goals.

Ben Pitterle, Channelkeeper's Watershed and Marine Program Director said, "For the first time ever, farmers can no longer just say that they plan to meet water quality standards. They actually have to do it within a specific timeframe or face the possibility of fines."

"This is a monumental victory for Ventura and Los Angeles county residents, who depend upon clean drinking water and unpolluted waters that support recreational uses, cultural practices, and native and endangered species," said Mati Waiya, Wishtoyo Foundation Executive Director and Chumash Ceremonial Elder. "Ventura County's residents and species have been plagued by agritoxins for too long."

"Throughout California, farmworker, immigrant and low-income communities disproportionately bear the burden of contaminated drinking water linked to agriculture production. This Ag Order will help protect against this negative impact in Ventura County," adds Maricela Morales, CAUSE Executive Director.

The new rules do more to protect surface waters from agricultural pollution than those currently in place in any other region in California and, as such, the Ventura and Los Angeles regional Ag Order sets a positive precedent for agricultural pollution regulations being developed in other regions across California.

"Los Angeles Waterkeeper is pleased that, for the first time ever, agricultural discharges must meet definitive timelines for complying with enforceable water quality standards. This is a major step forward for water quality in Los Angeles County," said Arthur Pugsley, Los Angeles Waterkeeper Senior Attorney.

Jason Weiner, Wishtoyo Foundation's and its Ventura Coastkeeper Program's General Counsel and Water Initiative Director, adds, "No individual or corporation is above the law, or their obligation to others and the environment. Despite the drought, revenues from Ventura County and California agricultural operations continue to hit all-time highs. It's time for a fair portion of those revenues to be used to protect the commons we all depend upon."

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About the Coalition

Founded in 1997, **Wishtoyo Foundation (“Wishtoyo”)** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit grassroots organization with over 700 members consisting of Ventura County’s diverse residents and Chumash Native Americans. Wishtoyo’s mission is to preserve and protect Chumash culture, the culture of all of Ventura County’s diverse communities, and the environment that our current and future generations depend upon. In 2000, Wishtoyo founded its **Ventura Coastkeeper Program (“VCK”)**. VCK’s mission is to protect, preserve, and restore the ecological integrity and water quality of Ventura County’s inland and coastal waterbodies for all beings in the County’s diverse community through outreach and education, restoration projects, advocacy, litigation, and community organizing and empowerment. www.wishtoyo.org

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper (“SBCK”) is a grassroots nonprofit organization that works to protect and enhance the water quality of the waters of southern Santa Barbara County for the benefit of its 900 members, as well as natural ecosystems and human communities. SBCK is dedicated to the preservation, protection and defense of the environment, wildlife, and the natural resources of the waters of southern Santa Barbara County and Ventura County, within the Ventura River watershed. <http://www.sbck.org>

Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy’s (“CAUSE’s”) mission is to build grassroots power to realize social, economic and environmental justice for the people of California’s Central Coast Region through policy research, leadership development, organizing, and advocacy. CAUSE’s vision is that together we can create a global community where we all contribute to, and benefit from, a sustainable economy that is just, prosperous and environmentally healthy. CAUSE’s staff, leaders and constituency work to organize our neighbors to address the systemic policy issues affecting the social, economic and environmental well being of our communities. In the Santa Clara River Valley, CAUSE works with the communities of Piru, Fillmore, Santa Paula, and Oxnard to improve these communities’ access to public transportation, healthy food, a clean environment, and recreational opportunities, including in the Santa Clara River. <https://causenow.org>

Los Angeles Waterkeeper (“LAWK”) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation, protection, and defense of the coastal and inland surface and ground waters of Los Angeles County from all sources of pollution and degradation, and to the maximum feasible use of water conservation, stormwater capture, and water recycling. Waterkeeper represents approximately 3,000 members who live and/or recreate in and around the Los Angeles area. <http://lawwaterkeeper.org>

The Center for Food Safety (“CFS”) is a national non-profit public interest and environmental advocacy organization working to protect human health and the environment by curbing the use of harmful food production technologies and by promoting organic and other forms of sustainable agriculture. CFS has more than 500,000 members throughout the United States, including in Los Angeles and Ventura counties, and with offices in San Francisco; Portland, Oregon; Honolulu; and Washington, D.C.. <http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org>