

Guest Columnist: Matt LaVere, Mayor, City of San Buenaventura

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A Sustainable Solution to Preserve Our Water Supply

Before we can begin to address our water supply issues in the Ventura River watershed, we must first recognize the problem, and realize we need to work together to solve it. Accordingly, I am pleased to report that the watershed's water leaders have agreed to come together to collaborate on developing a new sustainable approach to managing the watershed for the future.

The key to creating a lasting and viable solution to protect the Ventura River watershed is collaboration between all its diverse water users. We all understand the obstacles facing the watershed, and we're all at the table and ready to roll up our sleeves to establish a plan that secures our water supply. To that end, the parties to the litigation initiated by Santa Barbara Channelkeeper against the city of Ventura and the State Water Resources Control Board have started the settlement process by agreeing to a mediation meeting beginning in April where we will exchange ideas, raise tough questions and work together to find common ground.

Many of the region's diverse water users are in agreement that a locally-driven, physical solution achieved through a collective process is the ideal path forward. The city's objective, during this mediation and beyond, is to establish an adaptive and lasting framework that clearly recognizes the needs and rights of each water user, makes the most of the watershed's resources and shares the responsibility of preserving finite water supplies amongst all users. The city's desired outcome will not have any "winners" or "losers," but rather a shared commitment by all to protect the watershed. Collaboration is vital to this effort because, as you may know, the city of Ventura is just one of more than 100 users that pump and divert water from the watershed.

Mediation provides the opportunity to create a proactive resolution that provides procedures and protections to ensure all of the parties are part of the decision-making. The court process also provides a standardized process for all parties to provide the information necessary to assess everyone's future water use and needs. That's why it's the most efficient and effective approach to preserving our water supply.

The varied interests in the watershed and the current lack of collaboration and accountability have made it difficult to assess availability in our water system and effectively manage our limited water resources for the future. We are eager to leave these challenges in the past and charge forward with a strategy that considers all of the watershed's users and looks at the entire interconnected water system holistically.

The dialogue that will establish this framework for the future has already begun. Solving the obstacles facing our region's water resources — including the impacts of climate change, prolonged periods of drought and increased users — will take an investment of time and work, but I'm confident we can address them through a collective effort. The next steps of this effort, includes the first mediation next month, further, regular mediation sessions between all of the watershed's parties, careful analysis, technical and legal research to inform all of our proposed

solutions and, ultimately, a fair and lasting settlement approved by the court to protect the Ventura River watershed.

The city remains committed to positive momentum and ensuring that these critical challenges are resolved in a fair and proactive method that safeguards our water supplies now and moving forward.

Matt LaVere
Mayor of the City of San Buenaventura