



1 ROB BONTA  
 Attorney General of California  
 2 MYUNG J. PARK  
 Supervising Deputy Attorney General  
 3 MATTHEW G. BULLOCK (SBN 243377)  
 MARC N. MELNICK (SBN 168187)  
 4 Deputy Attorneys General  
 1515 Clay Street, 20th Floor  
 5 P.O. Box 70550  
 Oakland, CA 94612-0550  
 6 Telephone: (510) 879-0750  
 Fax: (510) 622-2270  
 7 E-mail: Marc.Melnick@doj.ca.gov  
*Attorneys for Respondent and Intervenor State*  
 8 *Water Resources Control Board*

**EXEMPT FROM FILING FEES  
 PER GOV. CODE § 6103**

9 ERIC M. KATZ  
 Supervising Deputy Attorney General  
 10 NOAH GOLDEN-KRASNER (SBN 217556)  
 Deputy Attorney General  
 11 300 South Spring Street, Suite 1702  
 Los Angeles, CA 90013  
 12 Telephone: (213) 269-6343  
 Fax: (213) 897-2802  
 13 E-mail: Noah.GoldenKrasner@doj.ca.gov  
*Attorneys for Intervenor California Department of*  
 14 *Fish and Wildlife*

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
 COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

19 **SANTA BARBARA CHANNELKEEPER,**  
 20  
 Petitioner,  
 21  
 v.  
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**STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL**  
 23 **BOARD, a California State Agency; CITY**  
**OF BUENAVENTURA, a California**  
 24 **municipal corporation,**  
 25  
 Respondents.  
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Case No. 19STCP01176  
**SWRCB AND CDFW'S STATUS  
 CONFERENCE REPORT**  
 Date: June 21, 2021  
 Time: 1:30 p.m.  
 Dept.: 10  
 Judge: Honorable W. Highberger  
 Trial Date: None Set  
 Action Filed: September 19, 2014

1 **CITY OF SAN BUENAVENTURA,**  
2 **California municipal corporation,**  
3 Cross-Complainant,  
4 **v.**  
5 **DUNCAN ABBOTT, an individual; et al.,**  
6 Cross-Defendants.  
7

8 Respondent and intervenor State Water Resources Control Board (the “State Water Board”)  
9 and intervenor California Department of Fish and Wildlife (the “Department”) respectfully  
10 submit this status conference report. The purpose of this report is to: (1) provide an update on  
11 the ongoing progress on the State Water Board’s groundwater and surface water model; (2)  
12 comment on the proposal by cross-complainant City of San Buenaventura (the “City”) to provide  
13 its proposed physical solution to the Court; and (3) object to the City’s proposal that some parties  
14 be excused from providing initial disclosure. The State Water Board and the Department have  
15 separately filed a response to the pending motions to bifurcate and to appoint a scientific advisor.

16 **I. THE STATE WATER BOARD’S GROUNDWATER AND SURFACE WATER MODEL**

17 As the Court and most of the parties know, the State Water Board has been working on a  
18 model of the interaction between the groundwater and surface water in the Ventura River  
19 watershed. Development of this model is an extraordinarily complex task, being performed under  
20 a contract worth approximately \$1.75 million. Creation of this model involves the integration of  
21 many interdisciplinary sets of data into a complex computer model, including the hydrogeologic  
22 characteristics of the groundwater basins, precipitation rates, evaporation rates, natural and  
23 human land uses, and groundwater pumping and surface water diversion rates. The necessary  
24 work also includes calibration and validation of the model and an evaluation of potential  
25 scenarios. The State Water Board will use the model as a tool to evaluate potential scenarios,  
26 such as changes in water management, land use, water infrastructure, and the environmental  
27 changes (for example, climate change).  
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1           **A. Historical Work**

2           Since 2016, the State Water Board has been committed to a transparent and rigorous public  
3 engagement process designed to build understanding and confidence in the model development  
4 process. This has included regular participation in local watershed group meetings and water  
5 management or fisheries conferences, at which the State Water Board has presented and provided  
6 updates on its efforts. The State Water Board’s past, present, and planned public engagement  
7 actions for model development, described below, also demonstrate an ongoing commitment to  
8 public engagement. While these actions add time and cost, they are designed to improve the  
9 model and the public’s understanding and confidence in the model. Additionally, the State Water  
10 Board decided to build the model using a free public domain modeling software that is  
11 maintained by the United States Geological Survey. Using a free public domain modeling tool is  
12 consistent with the State Water Board’s effort to provide transparency, building a tool that (once  
13 finalized) can be used by the public, and the Department of Water Resources best management  
14 practices for groundwater modeling under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

15           The State Water Board’s modeling contractor was hired in June 2017, pursuant to a  
16 publicly bid contract, and shortly afterwards the State Water Board used feedback from local  
17 agencies and stakeholders to form a Technical Advisory Committee (“TAC”) of local subject  
18 matter experts to solicit input throughout the model development process. The TAC includes  
19 technical representatives from the Department, Casitas Municipal Water District, Farm Bureau of  
20 Ventura County, Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency, , University of California at  
21 Santa Barbara, Upper Ventura River Groundwater Agency, Ventura County Watershed Protection  
22 District, Ventura Water (a department of the City), and the Ventura Watershed Instream Flow  
23 Enhancement and Water Resiliency Regional Framework Program (a group focused on  
24 streamflow enhancement through grant funded landowner projects and voluntary agreements).

25           State Water Board engagement with the public and TAC has included four comment  
26 periods on draft model development documents, email updates, public meetings, and site visits of  
27 the watershed. State Water Board engagement with the TAC on model development has included  
28 two in-person meetings and a three-part webinar series. Furthermore, the State Water Board has

1 worked with parties on the TAC to conduct site visits and exchange technical information, such  
2 as providing or requesting data or identifying appropriate data sources, to help inform model  
3 development.

4 Moreover, over the past four years, the State Water Board has provided the public and the  
5 TAC with significant documentation of model development. In November 2017, the State Water  
6 Board released a draft study plan describing the model development approach for a 30-day public  
7 and TAC comment period. After the Thomas Fire devastated the region in December 2017, the  
8 State Water Board extended the comment period into January 2018. In August 2018, the State  
9 Water Board released a draft memorandum describing its geologic analysis of the Ventura River  
10 Watershed for a 30-day public and TAC comment period. The draft geologic analysis described  
11 the modeling team's three-dimensional analysis of the geological features (including the alluvial  
12 and bedrock elements). The geologic analysis formed the framework for the groundwater portion  
13 of the model, which simulates groundwater flow rates and levels, and helps simulate  
14 groundwater-surface water interactions. In December 2019, the State Water Board released the  
15 final study plan for development of the model. Release of the final study plan, and subsequent  
16 documents, was partly delayed because of changes in response to public and TAC input, new  
17 state requirements that public documents meet Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility  
18 requirements, and the Thomas Fire, which affected the physical and hydrologic properties in the  
19 watershed. In April 2020, the State Water Board released a revised geologic analysis  
20 memorandum of the Ventura River watershed. In July 2020, the State Water Board released a  
21 draft data compilation report, explaining the data sources that will be used in the model, and  
22 solicited public and TAC comments to check if the data sources are appropriate for the model and  
23 to identify any additional data sources. In October 2020, the State Water Board released a draft  
24 sensitivity analysis approach memorandum for a 30-day public and TAC comment period. This  
25 document explained the planned methodology for conducting a sensitivity analysis of the model,  
26 which is testing how the model responds to varying key input parameters. All of these reports are  
27 available on the State Water Board's website:

28 [https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water\\_issues/programs/instream\\_flows/cwap\\_enhan](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/instream_flows/cwap_enhan)

1 [cing/ventura\\_river.html](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/ventura_river.html). The State Water Board’s counsel can provide these reports to the Court  
2 or any party upon request.

3 As indicated, the State Water Board has made available to the public the data it is relying  
4 on in model development, including the publication of the draft data compilation report last  
5 summer. As to any additional data the State Water Board has obtained since then, most of that  
6 data was identified during recent webinars, discussed below. Only the following three sets of  
7 data have not been provided, described, or summarized to the public by the State Water Board:  
8 (1) groundwater level and surface water monitoring data in the Lower Ventura River groundwater  
9 basin, provided by the Wood-Claeyssens Foundation in a comment letter sent to the State Water  
10 Board related to the draft geologic analysis; (2) a Lake Casitas bathymetry survey, provided by  
11 the Casitas Municipal Water District; and (3) estimates of the historic stage-storage relationship  
12 of Matilija Reservoir, provided by the Ventura County Watershed Protection District. The State  
13 Water Board will provide any publicly available data to any party upon their request.

#### 14 **B. Recent Webinars**

15 Recently, the State Water Board held three webinars for the public and TAC where State  
16 Water Board staff and its consultants presented model development information and solicited  
17 technical comments. These three webinars were held on May 5, 2021, May 19, 2021, and June 9,  
18 2021, and covered updates to the revised geologic analysis that was released last year, water  
19 demand and distribution inputs to the model, and the preliminary draft calibration results, which  
20 are necessary to demonstrate and ensure model accuracy. Each webinar lasted approximately  
21 three hours, and provided a substantial amount of additional information about the model to the  
22 public. Each webinar included both a technical presentation by the State Water Board modeling  
23 team and question and answer period. The webinars were recorded and are available for viewing  
24 on the State Water Board’s website referenced above. The State Water Board is soliciting public  
25 and TAC comments on the information provided in these webinars through June 25, 2021.

26 After evaluation of public and TAC comments related to the webinars, and completion of  
27 draft model documentation, the State Water Board will release the draft model and documentation  
28 to the public and TAC for a formal, at-least-60-day comment period. After consideration of those

1 comments on the draft model and documentation, the State Water Board will release a final  
2 version of the model and documentation.

### 3 **C. Recent Changes in the Schedule**

4 We had anticipated, as late as March 2021, that the State Water Board would release the  
5 draft model and documentation before the end of 2021. There is a fair amount of work still to be  
6 done, in evaluating public comments and writing and reviewing the comprehensive draft model  
7 documentation.

8 However, in consideration of the Court's and the public's desire for earlier access to the  
9 model, the State Water Board has modified the schedule. These changes were announced at the  
10 third of the webinars, on June 9, 2021. The highlights of these changes are discussed below.

11 In August 2021, the State Water Board will release a preliminary draft of the model, with a  
12 user manual to assist those in using it, but without the full model documentation. This new step,  
13 releasing an initial version of the model four months early, will allow any experts in this case to  
14 use the model to analyze the issue of interconnectivity that is central to the proposed first phase of  
15 this case (as proposed by the City).

16 In October 2021, the State Water Board will hold a webinar to explain, and solicit  
17 comments on, its methodology for the creation of eight scenarios of hypothetical situations using  
18 the model. There are a handful of currently contemplated scenarios, and they include an  
19 unimpaired flow scenario. An unimpaired flow scenario shows the movement and volume water  
20 in the watershed if no pumping or diversions occurred within the modern, modified, physical  
21 landscape of the watershed. The scenario will provide the budget of water that is available in the  
22 watershed for all beneficial uses.

23 In December 2021, the State Water Board will release an update of the draft model along  
24 with a report containing full comprehensive documentation. The State Water Board anticipates  
25 that this report will include results of the unimpaired flow scenario. The State Water Board will  
26 solicit public comment on the draft model and report.

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1           The State Water Board and the Department hope that the Court and the parties appreciate  
2 the State Water Board's efforts to be responsive to the Court's concerns about the timing of this  
3 important work. Counsel will be pleased to answer any questions at the status conference.

4           **II. THE CITY'S PROPOSED PHYSICAL SOLUTION**

5           The City has proposed to share with the Court its current settlement proposal, its current  
6 proposed stipulated judgment and physical solution. The State Water Board and the Department  
7 find this unusual, as the general practice is for the trier of fact to not be engaged in settlement  
8 conversations. Like other parties to this case, the State Water Board and the Department are  
9 engaged in confidential and privileged settlement discussions with the City about the proposed  
10 physical solution, and hope that those conversations will lead to a dramatically different  
11 document than is currently proposed by the City. The City's proposal to provide the Court with  
12 the City's proposed physical solution gives the Court a one-sided view of those discussions. We  
13 therefore suggest that the Court refrain from accepting the City's submission of the current status  
14 of their settlement proposal in the form of a physical solution.

15           Nevertheless, should the Court accept receipt of the City's proposed physical solution, the  
16 State Water Board and the Department request that the Court also allow the other parties  
17 (including the State Water Board and the Department) to provide the Court with their high-level  
18 critiques of the proposed physical solution and their suggestions for improvement. Some of those  
19 critiques are previewed in the State Water Board and the Department's February 2, 2021 status  
20 report (at pages 4, 7, and 8), but the Court is entitled to a more thorough discussion of the ways in  
21 which the current draft of the proposed physical solution does too little to reasonably protect  
22 beneficial uses, and in particular to improve the water conditions for Southern California  
23 steelhead that are at the center of this lawsuit. The State Water Board and the Department (and  
24 many other parties) cannot support the proposed physical solution in its current form.

25           **III. INITIAL DISCLOSURES**

26           As the Court is aware, the Court previously set a June 1, 2021 deadline for initial  
27 disclosures by parties who have appeared by March 1, 2021. Parties who have appeared after that  
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1 date have, under the statute, six months to provide initial disclosures. (Code Civ. Proc., § 842,  
2 subd. (a).)

3 Some parties have filed requests, or stipulations with the City, for extensions of the June 1,  
4 2021 initial disclosure deadline. The State Water Board and the Department have no objection to  
5 those reasonable requests for extensions.

6 In its draft status conference report, however, the City proposed that those cross-defendants  
7 that have stipulated to the current version of the City’s proposed physical solution be excused  
8 from the statutory and court-ordered initial disclosure requirements. This would be wholly  
9 inconsistent with the Court’s previous direction, when it set the June 1, 2021 deadline:

10 As noted above, this Court believes that notwithstanding any other stay on discovery  
11 in this case, the information to be provided by the Initial Disclosures provided by  
12 C.C.P. § 842 is essential to the orderly management of this case, including but not  
13 limited to the question of whether or not C.C.P. § 850(b) can be invoked by the  
14 proponents of the Proposed Stipulated Judgment. If there is any stay in place as to  
15 this obligation, it should and will be canceled forthwith. This Court will NOT agree  
16 to a further delay in the provision of this essential information.

17 (Feb. 9, 2021 Tentatives, served Feb. 7, 2021, p. 5.) There is no reason to change this direction.  
18 All parties should provide their initial disclosures at some point in this near future.  
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Dated: June 14, 2021

Respectfully Submitted,  
ROB BONTA  
Attorney General of California

MYUNG J. PARK  
Supervising Deputy Attorney General



MARC N. MELNICK  
Deputy Attorney General  
*Attorneys for Respondent and Intervenor  
State Water Resources Control Board*

ERIC M. KATZ  
Supervising Deputy Attorney General

NOAH GOLDEN-KRASNER  
Deputy Attorney General  
*Attorneys for Intervenor California  
Department of Fish and Wildlife*

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Dated: June 14, 2021

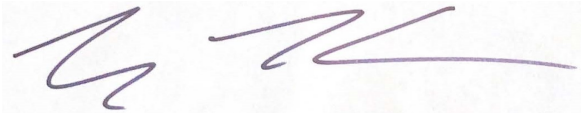
Respectfully Submitted,

ROB BONTA  
Attorney General of California

MYUNG J. PARK  
Supervising Deputy Attorney General

MARC N. MELNICK  
Deputy Attorney General  
*Attorneys for Respondent and Intervenor  
State Water Resources Control Board*

ERIC M. KATZ  
Supervising Deputy Attorney General



NOAH GOLDEN-KRASNER  
Deputy Attorney General  
*Attorneys for Intervenor California  
Department of Fish and Wildlife*

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