

Groups unite behind der

THREATENED RIVER:
Environmentalists say it's nearly useless and blocks steelhead trout.

By Brett Johnson
Staff writer

A virtual who's who of Ventura County's environmental community gathered Monday at Matilija Dam to repeat their desire to tear down the dam in light of the day's announcement that the Ventura River is a conservation group's

third-most endangered river in the nation.

Environmentalists, politicians and others hope that American Rivers' inclusion of the Ventura River in its annual rankings of waterways most threatened by dams, pollution and other ills will bring the spotlight and, more importantly, the money to tearing down the 53-year-old dam.

Matilija Dam is on Matilija Creek, a tributary of the Ventura River, and is about 16 miles upstream from where the river empties into the ocean. The dam — virtually filled in with sediment

and almost useless — deprives coastal beaches of sand and prevents endangered steelhead trout from getting upstream to ancient spawning grounds, environmentalists and American Rivers say.

"We're jumping on a snowball that's rolling downhill," Jim Edmondson, conservation director of California Trout Inc., told about 75 people as the dam towered in the background. "We've got a ways to go, but we will get there."

Edmondson said his group this week will ask the state Legislature for \$45 million for the dam's removal and the Department of

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Abolition of Matilija Dam

Fish and Game to start a steelhead recovery program. American Rivers said it will lobby Congress for money.

A U.S. Bureau of Reclamation study due out in May evaluates options that range from \$22 million to \$200 million in cost and 10 to 40 years in time. Matilija Dam is 198 feet high and spans more than 600 feet; it would be one of the largest dam removals in U.S. history.

An estimated 5 million to 7 million cubic yards of silt is behind the dam. That's 50 years' worth of beach, and releasing it

would add about 30 feet of sand to every county beach, said Paul Jenkin of the county's chapter of the Surfrider Foundation. The dam traps more than a third of the sand the river would deliver downstream, he added.

Others on hand included local politicians, the Environmental Coalition of Ventura County, the Environmental Defense Center, the Keep the Sespe Wild Committee, and Patagonia Inc., the Ventura-based and politically minded outdoor clothing and gear company.

About the only objection

longtime Matilija Canyon residents. They said tearing down the dam could bring in more ecotourists that would pollute the area, and also wondered about possible contamination in the sediment behind the dam.

"I'd like to see 'em check it out and see where it's coming from," said Bill Palmer.

Edmondson said sediment testing and an area management plan would be part of any dam removal.

— Brett Johnson can be reached at [phone number]

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Ventura River is one of worst

by Lenny Roberts

The Ventura River ranks third among the nation's most environmentally degraded rivers and its survival depends on the removal of Matilija Dam, according to a just-released report.

The report was generated by American Rivers, a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to protecting and restoring America's rivers and states that the 53-year-old Matilija Dam has outlived its usefulness. The report described the dam as an impassable roadblock for native Southern California steelhead runs, while contributing to the erosion of popular surfing beaches nearby. As part of a series of nationwide press conferences, members of California Trout, Supervisor Kathy Long's office, the Surfrider Foundation, the Environmental Defense Center and the Ventura Visitor and Convention Bureau addressed the media near the dam site Monday morning. Also attending the press



Y. Armando Nieto



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