Robert G. Kuhs, Esq. (SBN 160291)
Armand A. Ash, Esq. (SBN 365955)
LEBEAU • THELEN, LLP
9801 Camino Media, Suite 103
Post Office Box 22077
Bakersfield, California 93390
(661) 325-8962; Fax (661) 325-1475
rkuhs@lebeauthelen.com
aash@lebeauthelen.com

Roger J. Marzulla, Esq. (SBN 51113)
MARZULLA LAW, LLC
1150 Connecticut Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 822-6760; Fax (202)822-6774
roger@marzulla.com

Attorneys for Casitas Municipal Water District

EXEMPT FROM FILING FEES PURSUANT TO GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 6103

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA,

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

SANTA BARBARA CHANNELKEEPER, a California non-profit corporation,

Petitioner,

v.

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD, etc., et al.

Respondents.

CITY OF SAN BUENAVENTURA, etc.,

Cross-Complainant,

v.

DUNCAN ABBOTT, an individual, et al.

Cross-Defendants.

Case No. 19STCP01176

Judge: Hon. William F. Highberger

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF [PROPOSED] PHYSICAL SOLUTION FOR THE SAN ANTONIO CREEK MANAGEMENT AREA

Action Filed: September 19, 2014
Trial Date: June 1, 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SAN ANTONIO CREEK MANAGEMENT AREA PHYSICAL SOLUTION

Casitas Municipal Water District (**Casitas**) and the City of San Buenaventura (**City**) submit their proposed Physical Solution (**Solution**) for the San Antonio Creek Management Area (**SAC MA**), including the Ojai and Upper Ojai Valley Groundwater Basins (**Basins**), within the Ventura River Watershed (**Watershed**)[1].

A. Purpose and Scope

The Solution maintains and enhances suitable habitat for the endangered Southern California Steelhead while balancing all beneficial water uses. Because the Basins are not in a state of overdraft and the Ojai Basin is managed by the Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency (**OBGMA**) under SGMA, the Physical Solution does not adjudicate or determine water rights. The Solution appoints Casitas as the SAC MA Management Entity, but reserves to the OBGMA exclusive statutory jurisdiction to manage the Ojai Basin. The Court retains broad continuing jurisdiction to enforce the management plan and address future controversies. The Solution phases implementation over time and aligns reporting with SGMA-style five-year milestones for efficient coordination with basin management.

This Solution includes (1) a Management Plan (§ 4.2) with projects and objectives, and (2) a Monitoring and Reporting Plan (§ 4.2.5, Exhibit F). The Solution creates a focused, adaptive, and financeable program to maintain and improve steelhead habitat in the San Antonio Creek portion of the Watershed. Additionally, the Solution preserves reasonable and beneficial consumptive uses consistent with the Constitution and California water law and policy. This Solution resolves the need to adjudicate previously scheduled Phase 1 issues, and will mesh smoothly with a later approved plan for the mainstem and ultimately provide a single, seamless judgment and physical solution for the entire Watershed.

This Solution prioritizes tangible habitat actions, invasive flora and fauna removal, passage improvement, fish rescue and protection, and science-based monitoring in the SAC MA,

[1] *See* map at Exhibit B, SAC MA.

where targeted intervention will yield the greatest benefit to the endangered steelhead population segment.

Casitas, as the Management Entity, will implement the Solution under continuing Court supervision, with SGMA-consistent timelines, in coordination with the OBGMA and input from a standing Technical Advisory Committee (**TAC**), the State Water Resources Control Board (**State Board**), and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (**CDFW**). (§§ 4.4, 4.5) Funding will be provided through existing rates and substantial external grants, ensuring timely, trackable progress toward recovery objectives in the SAC MA. The Solution also provides adaptability to accommodate changing conditions, including the County of Ventura's impending removal of Matilija Dam.

B. Central Role of San Antonio Creek to Steelhead Recovery: Key Points

- The SAC MA is one of the largest sub-watersheds, about 50 square miles, with San Antonio Creek as the largest creek flowing to the Ventura River above Casitas Springs. Flow is highly variable and typically reaches zero baseflow between June and October, intensifying the need for targeted habitat measures for steelhead survival. The Watershed experiences drought cycles that prevent reliable anadromous migration, so suitable sheltering and rearing habitat must be created and maintained by human intervention to sustain the Ventura River steelhead population. The Plan uses steelhead habitat condition as a performance metric for instream uses and sets objectives to maintain and improve that habitat within the SAC MA.

- The SAC MA provides spawning and juvenile rearing habitat under suitable precipitation and geomorphic conditions, but suffers from limited pools, insufficient habitat complexity, *Arundo* invasion, and bank trampling that degrade spawning gravels and rearing cover. The Solution recognizes that post-1959 flow metrics are similar or higher than pre-development in key reaches, indicating that habitat loss and access—not flow alone—now limit steelhead viability, making habitat work in SAC MA decisive. The SAC MA leverages existing monitoring, known limiting factors, and discrete

implementable projects to quickly increase habitat quality and access for the population segment that occupies this portion of the Watershed.

- This Solution utilizes natural precipitation cycles, combined with habitat/access measures, to sustain habitat conditions.
- This Solution recognizes and builds on science that steelhead population cycles have evolved to rely on wet and dry periods.
- This Solution recognizes that SAC MA flows and habitat are highly variable and often seasonally intermittent, creating bottlenecks for juvenile rearing and adult holding that can be most effectively addressed with localized structural habitat improvements, invasive removal, and barrier remediation.
- The Ojai Basin's perched-aquifer connection to San Antonio Creek provides an identifiable groundwater-surface water linkage for targeted monitoring and management to protect instream conditions without broadly constraining deeper production aquifers.
- Existing gauges at Camp Comfort and near the Ventura River confluence facilitate flow-triggered rescue responses and evaluation of habitat-flow relationships in SAC MA reaches.

C. Phasing Based on Matilija Dam Removal

Because removal of the Matilija Dam will dramatically alter steelhead habitat throughout the Watershed, the Management Plan is divided into pre-and post-Dam removal phases:

- The Solution requires implementing habitat actions, monitoring, reporting, and revising actions based on best available science and new information under Court oversight.
- The Initial Implementation Phase begins upon the adoption of the Solution and runs through Matilija Dam removal, with annual reporting and five-year comprehensive assessments provided to the Court.
- The Secondary Implementation Phase continues for 10 years thereafter with the same reporting cadence to re-assess objectives and management actions.

D. Immediate Actions to Benefit Steelhead (§ 4.2)

- Boulder Augmentation Pilot Project: Install or modify boulders or equivalent clasts at selected San Antonio Creek locations to increase juvenile and adult rearing habitat, cover from predation, structural diversity, velocity refuges at high flows, and over-summering refuges at low flows, subject to permitting.

- Arundo Removal Program: the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy (**OVLC**) has $7,000,000 in CAL FIRE and CDFW grants, with $6,920,000 remaining to remove *Arundo* in SAC MA and the Ventura River mainstem; OVLC will report annually each March on removal results, expenditures, remaining funds, and planned activities for inclusion in the Annual Report.

- Removal of Barriers to Steelhead Passage: Within 180 days, CDFW and the Technical Advisory Committee will begin assessing man-made passage barriers in SAC MA, compiling ownership, barrier status, benefits, remediation costs, environmental and community impacts, feasibility, and timelines; a prioritized report is due within 18 months for Management Entity consideration and grant support.

- Management of Non-native Fish: The Management Entity will consider any CDFW-approved, funded non-native fish management plan, with annual March reporting by CDFW for the Annual Report.

- Fish Rescue Plans and Procedures: Within 180 days, CDFW will establish a notification process for stranded steelhead rescues, use existing authority for rescue and relocation, and provide annual March action reports.

- Population Protection: Within one year, CDFW and parties will develop a plan for enhanced anti-poaching signage and CALTIP publicization, subject to identified funding.

- Anthropogenic Impacts: Within 180 days, CDFW and relevant property authorities will convene and, within 18 months, develop and implement a coordinated plan to abate unlawful human impacts harming steelhead and steelhead habitat in SAC MA.

- Conservation Efforts: All parties will continue legally required water conservation, and agricultural parties will continue industry-standard efficiency measures, without altering water rights claims.

- Other Self-Funded Projects: Any party may propose scientifically grounded, funded habitat projects to the Technical Advisory Committee and Management Entity for consideration and possible implementation.

- San Antonio Creek Flow Monitoring and Fish Rescue: OBGMA studies indicate that outside water use activities within the perched-aquifer zone contributes to

recharge and enhances natural San Antonio Creek flow. The Management Entity will monitor Camp Comfort flows and, when flow approaches 0.5 cfs, conduct a survey for stranded fish and coordinate with CDFW for possible fish rescues.

E. Management Entity and Governance

- The Solution appoints Casitas MWD as the SAC MA Management Entity to implement the Solution in areas outside OBGMA's exclusive SGMA jurisdiction. Casitas will coordinate with OBGMA. Meetings will be open to the public, with agendas and minutes, similar to Brown Act requirements. (§§ 4.3.1, 4.3.2(a))

- The SAC MA is predominantly within Casitas' boundaries and will be managed by Casitas as an arm of the Court.

- The Management Entity's primary duty will be to implement the Management Plan and Monitoring Plan, including project construction, data gathering, and compliance, using its procedures and authorities consistent with law and the Court's orders.

- The Plan preserves local self-management in the Upper Ojai Basin, recognizing unique hydrology and partial drainage outside SAC MA.

- Other parties may propose self-management standards subject to approval.

- The State Board and CDFW will receive regular technical input opportunities on project design, construction, and performance, may sponsor self-funded habitat/flow programs, and are encouraged to streamline permitting to support the Solution.

- A three-person TAC will be appointed by the City of Ojai, County of Ventura, and OBGMA within 180 days, meeting publicly and advising the Management Entity on technical implementation and new projects. (§ 4.5)

F. Monitoring and Reporting Plan (§ 4.2.5, Ex. F)

- A detailed Monitoring and Reporting Plan (Exhibit F) establishes compliance, validation, and long-term trend monitoring, including temperatures, dissolved oxygen, flows, habitat mapping, snorkel surveys, genetics, and project performance, with standardized annual technical reports.

- The Management Entity will monitor habitat suitable for steelhead in San Antonio Creek, install measuring devices for water quality and flows, and use best available science, with updates as records are revised.

- If sound scientific evidence shows Upper Ojai groundwater production harms San Antonio Creek flows and public trust resources, the Management Entity may undertake demand reduction programs as needed.

G. Court Oversight and Dispute Resolution (§ 5.0)

- The Court will retain full continuing jurisdiction to interpret, enforce, and supplement the Solution, and may remove the Management Entity for good cause.
- Final Management Entity decisions are subject to *de novo* court review upon timely motion, with specified notice, timing, and appealable supplemental orders. Disputes under the Solution are first heard by the Management Entity, with written decisions and opportunity for court review; relative water right priorities remain reserved.

H. Financing the Plan

- The Management Entity will prepare and adopt an annual administrative budget covering operations and consultants at a public hearing, separate from but coordinated with its other budgets. Casitas MWD anticipates the currently identified SAC projects can be implemented within its existing water rate structure. (§ 4.3.2 (d).)
- Each project must include long-term operations, maintenance, and monitoring provisions, and sufficient funding for those components prior to approval. Annual reports will include fiscal summaries of revenue and expenditures, ensuring transparency and accountability for the financing of management actions.

I. Conclusion

The Plan sequences implementable actions in SAC MA that are permit-ready or supported by streamlined approaches, enabling early ecological gains while longer-horizon watershed changes, such as Matilija Dam removal, proceed. The Monitoring Plan centers on SAC MA habitat and fish response metrics, allowing adaptive management and Court-supervised accountability focused where endangered steelhead benefits can be measured most directly.

- Key Deliverables and Timelines:
  - Within 180 days initiate barrier assessment; establish stranded fish notification process; convene anthropogenic impact coordination meeting; Technical Advisory Committee participants appointed by their respective principals; begin Arundo ordinance collaboration reporting.

- Within 12 months: Complete signage and enforcement publicization plan, subject to funding; file annual Arundo and non-native fish reports each March, as applicable.
- Within 18 months: Deliver prioritized barrier remediation assessment and coordinated anthropogenic impact abatement plan.
- Annually and every five years: File Annual Reports with habitat status against Baseline Conditions, fiscal summaries, production inventory, new production evaluations, and five-year cumulative assessments aligned with SAC MA milestones.

Date: April 10, 2026

LEBEAU THELEN, LLP

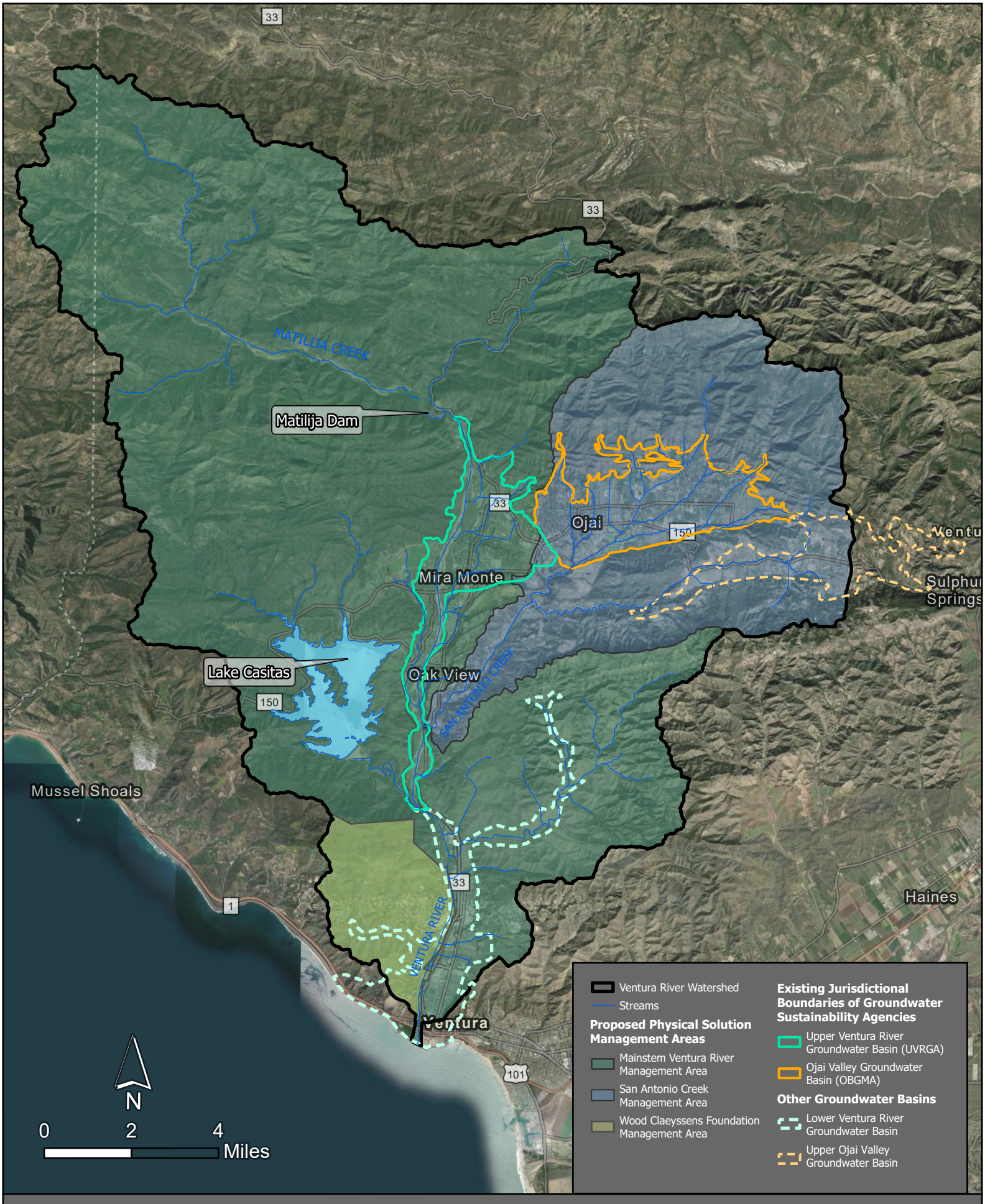
By: /s/ Robert G. Kuhs
ROBERT G. KUHS, ESQ.
Attorneys for Casitas Municipal Water District

Date: April 10, 2026

MARZULLA LAW, LLC

By: /s/ Roger J. Marzulla
ROGER J. MARZULLA, ESQ.
Attorneys for Casitas Municipal Water District

EXHIBIT B



Ventura River Watershed Proposed Management Areas

PROOF OF SERVICE

Los Angeles County Superior Court Complex Action Case No. 19STCP01176

STATE OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF KERN

I, Kristen L. Moen, declare I am a citizen of the United States and a resident of the county aforesaid; I am and was at the times of the service hereunder mentioned, over the age of eighteen (18) years, and not a party to the within cause. My business address is: 9801 Camino Media, Suite 103, Bakersfield, CA 93311.

On April 10, 2026, I caused to be served the below listed document(s) titled as: **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF [PROPOSED] PHYSICAL SOLUTION FOR THE SAN ANOTNIO CREEK MANAGEMENT AREA** on the interested parties in this action as listed below.

XX **VIA FILE & SERVEXPRESS:** I affected electronic service by submitting as electronic version of the document(s) to File & ServeXpress, LLC, which caused the document(s) to be sent by electronic transmission to the person(s) at the electronic service address(es) listed.

XX **(STATE)** I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the above is true and correct, and that the foregoing was executed on **April 10, 2026**, in Bakersfield, California.

/s/ Kristen L. Moen
KRISTEN L. MOEN