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ORANGE COUNTY WATER DISTRICT RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS AWARD FOR SANTA ANA RIVER CONSERVATION PROGRAM

FOUNTAIN VALLEY, Calif. – Orange County Water District (OCWD) was recently awarded the 2001 Theodore Roosevelt Environmental Award from the Association of California Water Agencies. OCWD earned the award for its Excellence in Natural Resources Management, which involved development of a long-term plan to remove a non-native, invasive plant – *Arundo donax* – from the Santa Ana River watershed. *Arundo* is a destructive plant that annually uses two to three times more water than native habitat. *Arundo* also has no value to the River's habitat, and it takes up space where other valuable, native vegetation could flourish.

In 1997, OCWD formed a team of seven other organizations to develop an aggressive five-year plan to restore resources along the River for the benefit of wildlife and citizens, which included the removal of *Arundo donax* from the Santa Ana River. Funding for this plan is provided through multiple agencies and is secured in the Santa Ana River Conservation Trust Fund.

The organizations involved in the *Arundo* removal project include OCWD, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), The Nature Conservancy, East Valley Resource Conservation District (RCD), Elsinore-Anza-Murrieta RCD, Inland Empire West RCD, Riverside-Corona RCD and San Jacinto Basin RCD. During the creation of the Trust Fund, these eight organizations met to develop the restoration plan. Once the Trust Fund was established, plan implementation began, with yearly progress reports continuing since inception.

The Santa Ana River Conservation Trust Fund – originally created in 1997 by OCWD to bring back the endangered least Bell's vireo songbird – was funded with an initial amount of \$2.35 million: \$1 million from OCWD and \$1.35 million from the Corps of Engineers. Since 1997, the Fund has received an additional \$5.7 million in funds from OCWD, County of Orange, City of Corona, EPA grants and a variety of other sources. An additional \$350,000 has been contributed by two housing developers, for a total of \$6.3 million contributed to date.

OCWD and USFWS have a history of maintaining species and increasing habitat along the Santa Ana River. Relationships with federal and local organizations have been built not only through OCWD's water quality and least Bell's vireo recovery success at its Prado Wetlands, but also through its efforts with *Arundo* destruction and years of investigation to find a more effective solution for *Arundo* removal. OCWD, USFWS and the other participating agencies agreed that

an organized effort by multiple groups to destroy *Arundo* and recreate habitat was necessary.

Having the necessary experience and knowledge, and facing the need to remove *Arundo* in order to take advantage of a water conservation opportunity, OCWD created the Santa Ana River Conservation Trust Fund and manages it for all agencies involved. OCWD's seed money paved the way for work to be accomplished throughout the Santa Ana River watershed expanding beyond OCWD's boundaries immediately behind Prado Dam. The long-term result will be much more effective and worthwhile, not only for OCWD, but also for other agencies in the state.

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Orange County Water District is a state agency that was created by the California State Legislature in 1933 to maintain and manage the groundwater basin under northern and central Orange County. OCWD's groundwater basin supplies 75% of the water needs in Anaheim, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, Irvine, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Orange, Placentia, Santa Ana, Seal Beach, Stanton, Tustin, Villa Park, Westminster, and Yorba Linda. To learn more about water in Orange County, log on to www.ocwd.com.

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