

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Our area is home to many threatened and endangered species. Significant habitat alteration, especially along the Santa Ana River and its tributaries, has been a major factor in the decline of a number of species within our watershed. The Santa Ana sucker, a native fish, has been listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

Scientific studies and other cooperative efforts for sucker conservation are being conducted by the Sucker Conservation Program. The funding partners include the County of Orange, Orange County Water District, Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, Riverside County Transportation Department, City of Riverside Regional Water Quality Control Plant, Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, and City of San Bernardino Municipal Water Department. Other active participants include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board, among others. Reports and other information are available on the web site at www.SAWPA.org

THE SANTA ANA SUCKER

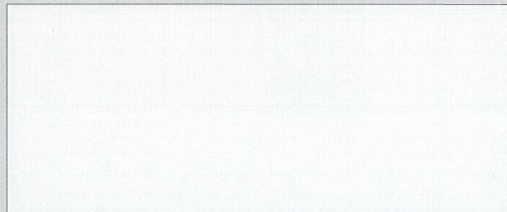


The Santa Ana sucker (*Catostomus santaanae*) is a fish that was common in streams of the Santa Ana Watershed and other rivers of Southern California as recently as the 1970's. It is now rarely found in the Santa Ana and San Gabriel Rivers, and has all but disappeared from other areas where it was once common. Because of the marked decline in the numbers of these fish, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently listed the Santa Ana sucker as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

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DESCRIPTION

The Santa Ana sucker is about six inches long, with large, thick lips used for scraping algae off the stream bed. It has a mottled, dark colored back and a silver underside. Spawning occurs from early April to early July. What cues

spawning in the sucker is relatively unknown, but changes in flow (associated with high spring flows) has been cited as



the cue for other suckers within the same genus. Female suckers are capable of producing 4,000 to 16,000 eggs. They hatch in 10-14 days; time to hatching is temperature dependent (colder weather will delay hatching, warmer will speed it up).

The Santa Ana sucker prefers small, shallow streams where water is cool and clear. The Santa Ana sucker inhabits streams that are generally small shallow and permanent. The streams are narrow, usually only 5-8 meters wide and only about 15-30 cm deep.

FEEDING

The sucker is primarily a bottom feeder. The lower lip contains cartilaginous ridges that allow it to scrape algae, diatoms and detritus from the surface of rocks and other hard substrates. Aquatic insects make up a smaller portion of the suckers diet, however, larger fish generally feed more on insects than do the smaller ones (Greenfield et al. 1970).

Comparison of suckers located in the San Gabriel and Santa Ana Rivers suggested that the fish on the San Gabriel River had a higher percentage of insects in their diet (Saiki 2000).

A Sucker and an Arroyo Chub

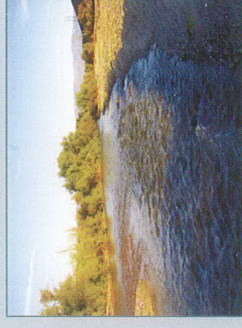


This may have been a result of the increased number of insects available on the San Gabriel River.

HABITAT

The Santa Ana sucker prefers streams with rocky substrate, clear, cool water, and vegetation cover on the sides. However, there has been some evidence that usable substrates may include sand.

Flow must be present within the stream but it can vary from slight to swift. Native



streams frequently have large flows due to flood events, and the sucker seems capable of coping with the increased flow and turbidity.

Changes in the Santa Ana sucker's habitat are the prime reason this species is struggling. Water diversions, stream channelization, erosion, and pollution have remarkably altered the sucker's native habitat. In many instances, this habitat has been so altered the sucker is no longer able to survive there. With the listing of the sucker as a threatened species, conservationists hope that something can be done to restore suckers to the Santa Ana and San Gabriel Rivers. Restoration of some of the altered habitat is needed if suckers are going to increase their numbers.