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Threatened Fish Thrive in Restored Creek, Signaling Success for Water Reliability

[San Bernardino, CA, September 10, 2026] – Just months after reconnecting Anza Creek to the Santa Ana River, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District (San Bernardino Valley) has documented adult Santa Ana sucker and hundreds of newly hatched juvenile fish in the restored creek, signaling successful spawning far sooner than biologists expected.

The federally threatened Santa Ana sucker occupies a limited area of the Santa Ana River and depends on specialized habitat for feeding and reproduction. Restoring tributaries like Anza Creek expands that habitat, providing native fish with places to spawn and forage for algae to scrape off rocks to eat, and find refuge from high flows. Biologists have also observed Arroyo chub, another native fish considered a species of special concern by the State of California.

“This is an extraordinary result,” said T. Milford Harrison, San Bernardino Valley Board President. “Years of science and collaboration went into creating habitat specifically for these native fish. Seeing them thrive in the restored creek so quickly shows this approach is working to protect the natural resources of the Santa Ana River while helping develop reliable local water supplies for the region.”

Anza Creek is part of a broader tributary restoration effort under the Upper Santa Ana River Habitat Conservation Plan (USAR HCP) and the Santa Ana River Conservation and Conjunctive Use Project (SARCCUP), a regional conservation and permitting program underway since 2015. Along with Hidden Valley Creek, the project restores tributary habitat to offset impacts on native fish and the River ecosystem resulting from operations of current and future water and infrastructure projects. Additional conservation projects include Lower Hole Creek, Old Ranch Creek and Hidden Valley Wetlands.

Anza Creek was reconnected to the Santa Ana River in April 2026. Biologists hoped native fish would begin using the restored habitat within a year or more, with reproduction expected after the next spawning season in February 2027. Instead, based on survey data,

biologists confirmed that Santa Ana sucker found the restored channel within weeks or even within days, and began reproducing almost immediately.

The results are significant for both conservation and regional water supply reliability. The USAR HCP provides a 50-year permit and coordinated environmental mitigation for 100 current and future water infrastructure projects to be built over 50 years across San Bernardino, Rialto, Highland, Mentone, Riverside, Chino and Chino Hills. Demonstrating successful habitat restoration in advance can help streamline environmental permitting for projects that capture, recharge and deliver water throughout the region.

“Tributary restoration demonstrates that environmental stewardship and water reliability can advance together,” said Heather Dyer, San Bernardino Valley Chief Executive Officer and General Manager. “By investing in conservation at a regional scale, we are protecting native species and a healthy Santa Ana River while helping local water providers build projects that strengthen the region’s water supply.”

The restoration also gives new ecological value to an area previously considered a “dead zone.” As vegetation becomes established, biologists will continue monitoring the site for Least Bell’s Vireo and other riparian birds, as well as the South Coast garter snake. Rock removed from regional flood control basins was repurposed for the restored channel, and palm trees removed from the site were recycled into mulch rather than sent to a landfill.

Combined planning, design, and construction costs for the Anza Creek and Hidden Valley Creek restoration projects totaled \$12.8 million. The projects secured \$11 million in grant funding, reducing the cost to USAR HCP applicants to just \$1.8 million.

For more information about the Upper Santa Ana River Habitat Conservation Plan, visit www.sbvmd.com.

About San Bernardino Valley

San Bernardino Valley is a regional water agency with a service area that covers around 353 square miles in southwestern San Bernardino County and a small portion of Riverside County with a population of approximately 714,000. With a dedicated team of experts and partnerships across the region, San Bernardino Valley is committed to building a resilient and sustainable water future for the community. Learn more at www.sbvmd.com.