



Santa Ana River Mouth Monitoring Project January-June 2023 Report



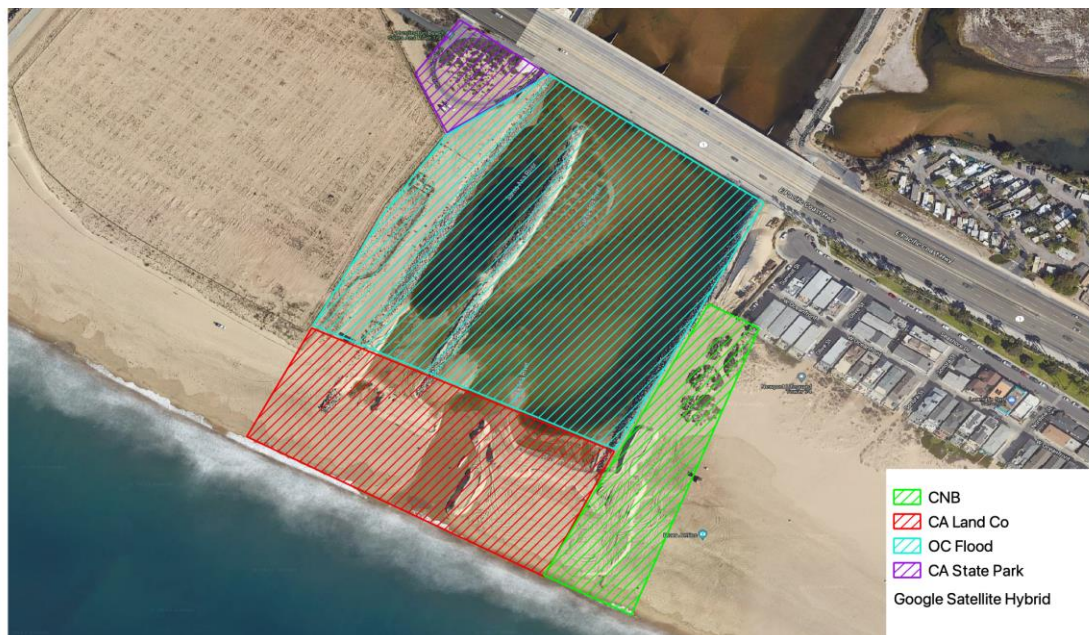
Orange County Coastkeeper (Coastkeeper) is a nonprofit clean water organization that serves as a proactive steward of our fresh- and saltwater ecosystems. We work collaboratively with diverse groups in the public and private sectors to achieve healthy, accessible, and sustainable water resources for the region. We implement innovative, effective programs in education, advocacy, restoration, research, enforcement, and conservation.

The Santa Ana River Mouth Monitoring Project (SAR Project) enlists volunteers, community groups and local government to monitor human, dog and bird activity in the Santa Ana River Mouth area, a 13.2 acre parcel of land that is owned by four agencies including the California State Lands Commission, California State Parks, the County of Orange, and the City of Newport Beach. Due to the fragmented ownership of the area and differing regulations, management of activities and law enforcement in the area have been difficult. The six months of the SAR Project covered in this report (January 2023 through June 2023) was run as an ongoing project by Orange County Coastkeeper (OCCCK) with funding from the California Coastal Conservancy. The goal of the SAR project is to monitor human, dog, and bird use of the area and to provide education and outreach to residents and visitors about the Wildlife Management Area at the Santa Ana River Mouth and the endangered species that reside within it.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between January and June 2023, 1094 surveys at the Santa Ana River Mouth were completed by 18 trained volunteers and 3 employees. In the surveys collected, 9,256 people and 798 dogs were observed. Of the dogs 548 were off-leash and 250 on-leash. Dogs off-leash accounted for 69% of the dogs observed. Law Enforcement Officers were present 162 times throughout all surveys completed in this time period with Lifeguards observed most frequently followed by Police. No citations were observed to be issued, though 9 contacts were made by law enforcement officers.

MAP AND PROJECT BOUNDARIES



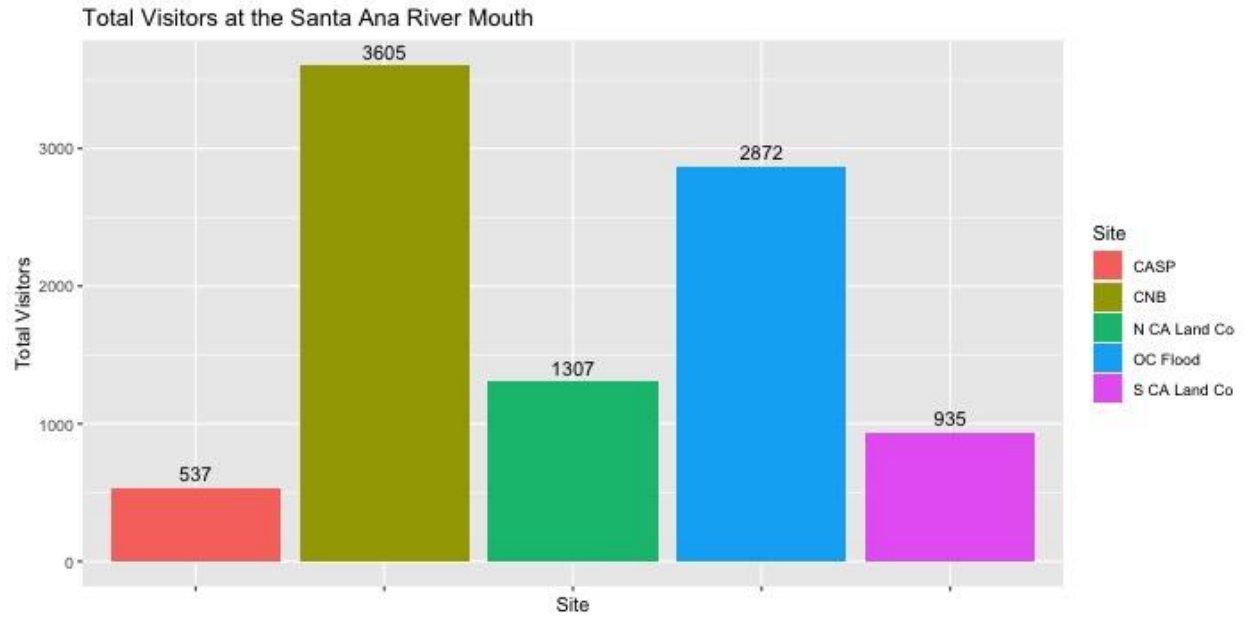
Map of Santa Ana River Mouth with property names overlaid to correlate with data sheets. **CASP**=California State Parks; **OC Flood**=Orange County Flood Control Channel; **CNB**= City of Newport Beach; **CA Land Co**= California State Lands Commission. In our data collection and analysis California State Lands Commission property was split into North and South portions, divided by the location of the river mouth during surveys, to improve our ability to understand access and use in the area.

ANALYSIS

Previously the data was analyzed using Excel, the datasheet has since been reformatted to be easier to use by volunteers and compatible with R; a statistical analysis program widely used in scientific writing for data visualization. The graphs were coded using the R programming language, allowing for higher efficiency in analysis and easier replication.

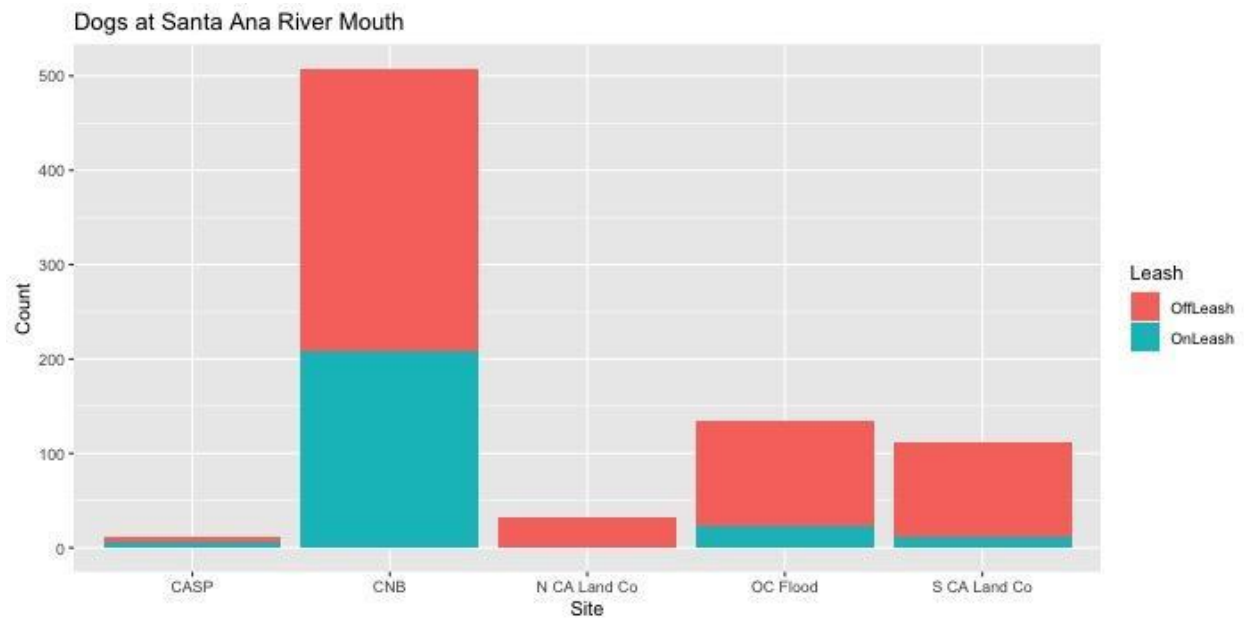
GRAPHS

Visitors Based On Location



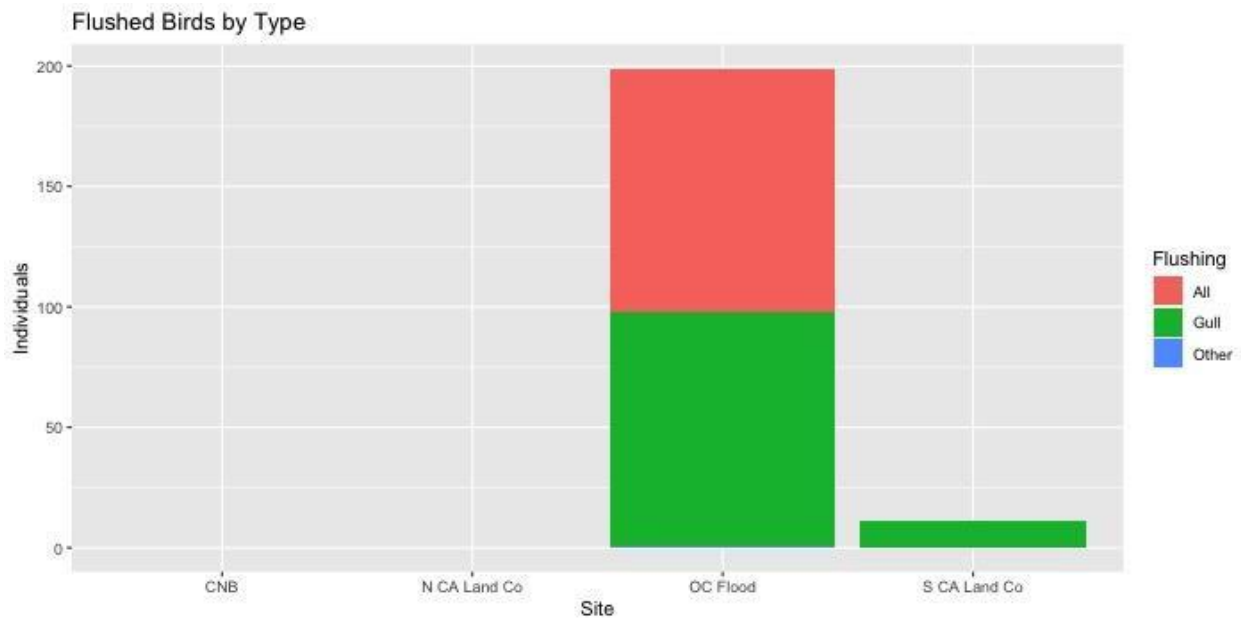
Dogs Based On Location

A total of 798 dogs were recorded at the Santa Ana River Mouth; 250 (31%) were on leash and 548 (69%) were off leash.



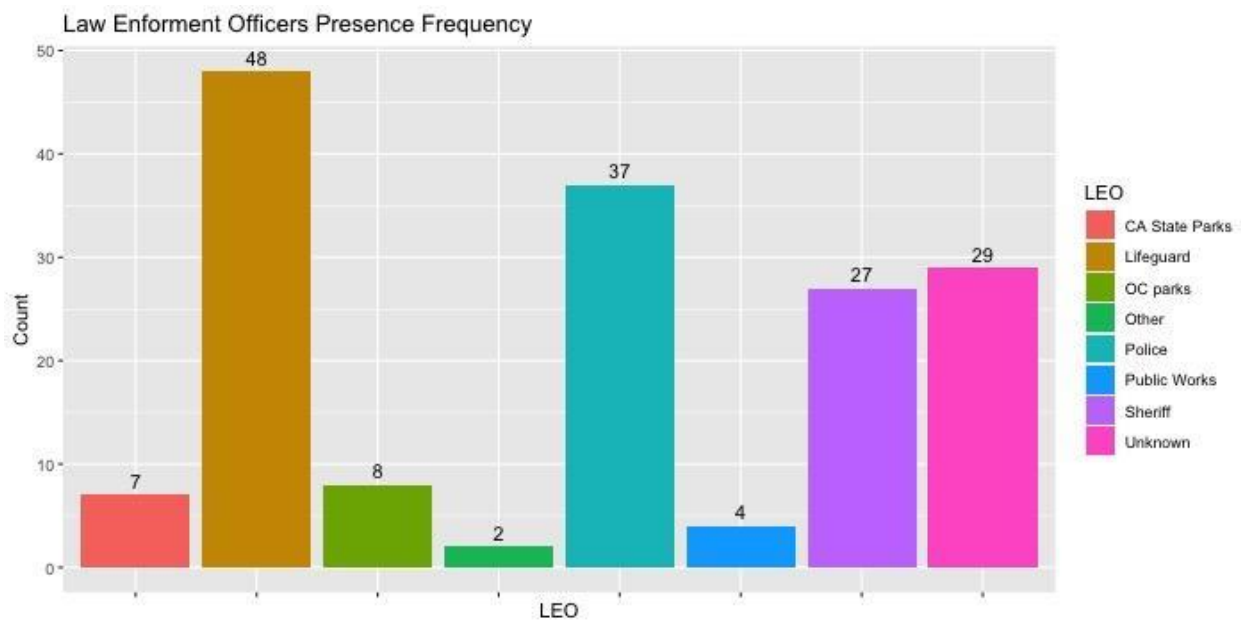
Bird Disturbances By Location

Bird disturbance, also known as flushing events, are defined when birds are present on a part of the beach and are approached by humans and/or dogs and they depart the beach. A total of 210 flushing events occurred in the OC Flood and South California Lands Commission jurisdictions. 48% of the bird flushes included a mix of terns, gulls, and shorebirds, 51% of the bird flushes were only gulls, and less than 1% consisted of other bird species.

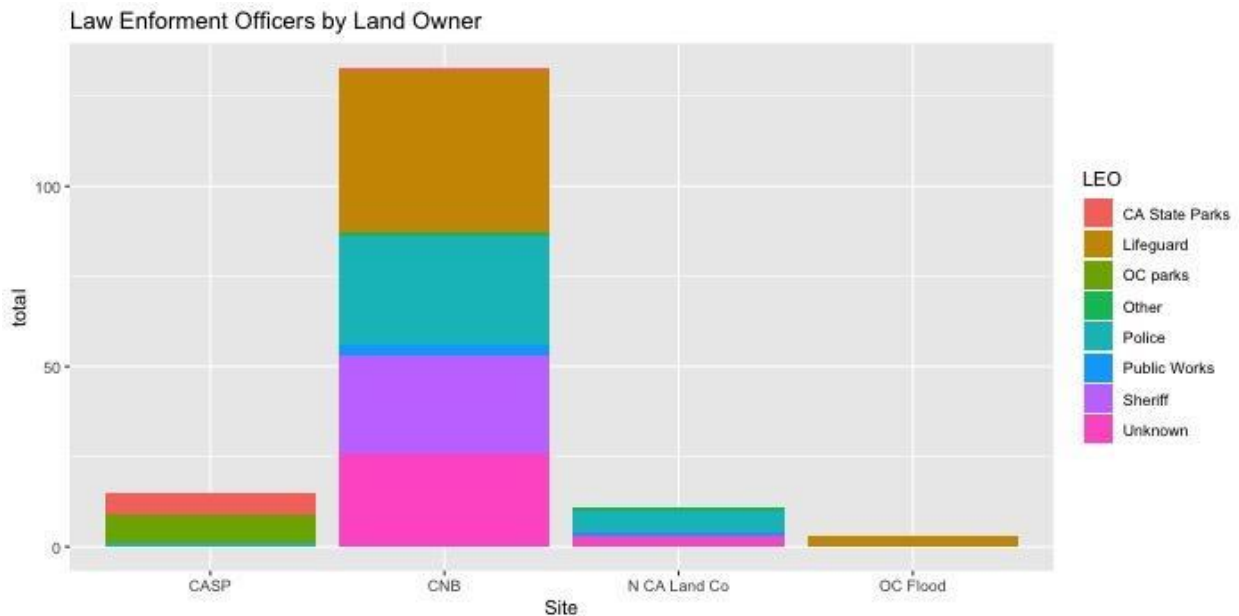


Law Enforcement Officers (LEO) Frequency

A total of 162 law enforcement officers were present during observational surveys. There were a total of 9 contacts made by various law enforcement officers.



Law Enforcement Officers by Location



TRAINING

Training took place with two components, an online one hour Zoom training that took place in February 2021 was recorded and distributed to new volunteers along with training documents. Volunteers then met with Volunteer Coordinator Sabrina Medina at the Santa Ana River Mouth to go over the monitoring protocol and the property map in person. Volunteers were trained to understand the land manager boundaries, monitor human recreation use, and identify bird species. In addition volunteers were instructed how to fill out the data sheet and given access to the standard operating protocol for the surveys.

OUTREACH TABLE


During this project Orange County Coastkeeper was able to conduct an outreach table for beach visitors. Visitors were given pamphlets detailing information about California Least Terns and Western Snowy Plovers. Additional information about the laws regarding dogs in the area and free biodegradable waste bags were provided to visitors as well. Between January and June 2023 the outreach table was set up at the Santa Ana River Mouth and targeted recreational beach users. Challenges for our public outreach included issues with volunteer recruitment and retention, and staffing capacity as the project was restarted after a funding hiatus. Overall OC Coastkeeper engaged in one on one or small group conversations with 14 visitors during the reporting period. An updated informational banner was developed to be used at outreach events that highlights the endangered and threatened species of birds and City of Newport Beach dog rules.



THREATENED AND ENDANGERED BIRDS ON THE BEACH



Western Snowy Plovers are a small species of shorebird that rely on coastal habitat. They use sandy beaches for nesting and forage on marine invertebrates along the shoreline. The Santa Ana River Mouth is considered Critical Habitat by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service due to the wide open spaces and minimal vegetation. Additionally the kelp and driftwood found on the beach helps harbor food and offers protection from predators.

Western Snowy Plovers



California Least terns have a limited habitat along California coastlines. They use sandy beaches to nest and primarily use estuaries and lagoons to hunt. Least terns can be seen hovering over the Santa Ana River Mouth before plunging into the water for prey. This federally endangered species habitat has severely reduced due to coastal development and beach recreation.

California Least Terns

PROTECT THE BIRDS OF THE SANTA ANA RIVER MOUTH


Our fur babies don't mean to, but they can often scare off small hard to see threatened and endangered species causing them to abandon their nests.

LET THE BIRDS BE
Share the beach

WHEN ARE DOGS ALLOWED?

City of Newport Beach

- Dogs are never allowed on the beach or any beachfront sidewalk between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., including the ocean front beaches and bay front beaches.
- Before 10 a.m. and after 4:30 p.m., dogs are allowed, if they are securely restrained by a substantial leash or chain not exceeding six feet in length and controlled by a person who is competent to restrain the dog.
- Off-leash dogs are never allowed in any public spaces including parks and beaches.



Shorebirds

Seagulls

Brown Pelicans

Keeping dogs on leash can help protect the birds that are nesting at the Santa Ana River Mouth!

Other Updates

This project is funded through a grant from the California Coastal Conservancy. Due to a gap in funding during a contract update to augment our funding, all data collection in January through early April of 2023 was done by previously trained volunteers. Paid staff resumed work on the project in April 2023 when the new funding became available. Since that time the project has been growing in volunteers and staff involvement, which has led to the creation of a Standard

Operating Procedure to ensure consistency in our survey methods. A new datasheet was also created to ease the data collection process and eliminate discrepancies. Other outreach materials, including a new banner, were also updated to increase public awareness.

Next Steps

Our next steps in this project include additional volunteer recruitment from the local community, continuation of the outreach table, and continuing to gather surveys. We will be purchasing needed equipment and updating our training materials. We will also begin presentations to local community outreach to state and local agency staff to get the information from this project to all interested parties.