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NEWS RELEASE



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Ventura County District Attorney Files Civil Environmental Enforcement Action Alleging Unlawful Streambed Alteration Near Santa Paula

VENTURA Calif. – District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today that the Ventura County District Attorney's Office has filed a civil environmental enforcement action against Guadalupe A. Guzman, the Lupe and Carmen Guzman Revocable Family Trust, Santa Paula Hay and Grain and Ranches, LLC, and related defendants for alleged unlawful streambed alteration, diversion, grading, and pollution activities on multiple ranch properties near Wheeler Canyon Road east of Santa Paula.

The complaint, filed in Ventura County Superior Court on May 14, 2026, alleges defendants engaged in unauthorized construction and land disturbance activities that have significantly affected streams and surrounding habitat areas on six separate properties associated with the Hampton Ranch and Valestrino properties. According to the complaint, the alleged activities included pond and dam construction, stream grading, vegetation removal, placement of fill material, and diversion or obstruction of natural stream flows without required authorization.

"The allegations in this case describe significant and permanent damage to Ventura County's natural landscape," said District Attorney Nasarenko. "According to the complaint, waterways, streambeds, and surrounding habitats were altered in ways that may leave environmental scars for generations. Our office is committed to enforcing California's environmental protection laws, holding offenders accountable, and forcing bad actors to pay for their alleged natural resources destruction."



Before



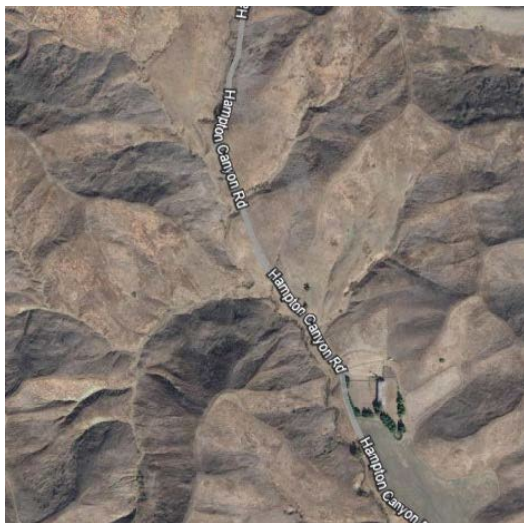
After

The civil action alleges violations of California Fish and Game Code section 1602, which regulates activities that substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of rivers and streams or alter streambeds, channels, or banks. The complaint also alleges violations of Fish and Game Code section 5650 involving the discharge or placement of substances deleterious to fish, plant life, mammals, and bird life into waterways, as well as violations of California's Unfair Competition Law.

As alleged in the complaint, the activities occurred on properties connected to commercial ranching and farming operations in the Wheeler Canyon area. The complaint alleges ongoing impacts to streams and surrounding environments, including ephemeral streams, which are waterways that flow seasonally or after rain events.

According to the complaint, alleged activities on the properties included:

- Construction of ponds and dams
- Grading and alteration of stream channels
- Placement of fill and foreign materials in and around waterways
- Vegetation removal
- Diversion and obstruction of natural water flow
- Land disturbance affecting surrounding habitats



2019



2024

“Years of alleged unauthorized streambed alteration, grading, fill placement, and vegetation removal affecting stream systems in Wheeler Canyon are at the center of this complaint,” said Senior Deputy District Attorney Edward Andrews, a member of the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office Environmental Protection Unit. “California’s environmental protection laws are intended to preserve waterways, wildlife habitat, and the long-term health of our communities by ensuring landowners and businesses conduct activities responsibly and with appropriate environmental oversight.”

The complaint seeks injunctive relief to halt further violations, civil penalties, environmental restoration, and recovery of investigative and remediation costs.

Streambeds and ephemeral waterways play a critical role in Ventura County's ecosystem and watershed health. Even seasonal streams help manage stormwater flow, reduce erosion, recharge groundwater, and provide habitat for fish, birds, mammals, and native vegetation. Unauthorized grading, fill placement, and diversion activities can increase erosion and sedimentation, degrade water quality, heighten downstream flooding risks, and damage sensitive habitats and wildlife corridors.

This case was investigated by the Ventura County District Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Division, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, California State Water Resources Control Board, and County of Ventura.