

THE POWER OF ONE: Paul Jenkin

By Laura Mazzarella

Paul Jenkin was always concerned about environmental issues, but felt helpless when facing the issues that affect our coast. He witnessed dunes transported off a public beach to benefit a new hotel development during college. He even quit his job as an Ocean Engineer after learning that the military systems he worked with were instrumental in killing whales and dolphins. His many calls to government officials did little to help the situations.

So in 1994, when a friend invited him to a Surfrider Foundation Ventura Chapter meeting, he was compelled to get involved. His wife, Alisa, always encouraged him to "stop complaining and do something," and with her support, he has.

Now as Environmental Director of the Ventura Chapter, Paul coordinates many successful campaigns including the Surfers' Point Project and the Matilija Dam Project. The Surfers' Point Project evolved because of coastal erosion threatening an ill-conceived parking lot and bike path. Local authorities wanted to build a seawall of concrete and rocks to protect the structure, but this would destroy the irreplaceable wave break, Surfers' Point. Convincing government officials to move back the structure and rebuild the beach would prove greater than Paul ever imagined, but he mobilized early. Thanks to Paul and the Chapter's efforts, there is no seawall at Surfers' Point. After a hard fought ten years, the final planning is almost complete for a first of its kind "managed retreat" project that will relocate the parking lot inland and restore the beach as a natural buffer.

Surfers' Point is not the only area that Paul noticed plagued with extreme erosion threats. He realized that the lack of sediment at the mouth of the Ventura River was being affected because of the Matilija dam. Over the past 50 years the dam has trapped over

6 million cubic yards of sediment that would have naturally made it to the beaches. And if the dam remains in place it will continue to trap another 3 million cubic yards over the next 30 or 40 years, making coastal erosion even worse.

Removing the dam will increase the river deposits by about a third, helping to reverse the long-term trends of beach erosion along the river delta. In order to raise public awareness about the negative impact of the dam, the Chapter published a bumper sticker saying "Give a Dam, Free the Sand, Grow the Beach."

From this grass roots beginning, Paul was able to build political support and work with government agencies. Following years of study, the Corps of Engineers completed a Feasibility Study last year that outlines a plan to remove Matilija Dam. If all goes well, the deconstruction will begin in 2009. This will be a first for California, and one of the biggest dams ever removed.

Paul and the Ventura Chapter continue tirelessly working to ensure that Surfers' Point is preserved and protected, while keeping the pressure on local and state government agencies to remove the Matilija Dam and restore the beaches of Ventura.

Paul optimistically relates, "If these things happen, the Ventura County coast will be seen around the world as a place where local grass roots activism helped turn the tide of environmental degradation by undoing some of the mistakes of the past." Paul believes that this will give others the power to take on their local issues, making "think globally, act locally" a reality. To learn more about these campaigns please visit the Ventura Chapter website at www.surfrider.org/ventura.

