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County To Temporarily Close Portion of Santa Ana River Trail for Project, Actively Enforce Public Access Hours

Santa Ana, CA (Jan. 8, 2018) — Beginning Monday, January 22, 2018, the County of Orange will temporarily close a portion of the Santa Ana River Trail (SART) from Memory Lane in Orange to Taft Avenue/Ball Road in Anaheim for an environmental remediation project. Upon completion of the project, estimated to last up to three months, the County will reopen the closed portion of the SART for recreational trail use during posted public access hours.

The SART runs adjacent to the Santa Ana River flood control channel for recreational trail use during posted public access hours. The west side of the SART from Memory Lane to Taft Avenue/Ball Road will be closed to public access for the duration of the project, which is anticipated to last up to three months. During the temporary closure, signs will be posted clearly marking the closed areas. The County intends to reopen the trail segment for recreational use upon completion of the project.

The environmental remediation project includes various activities related to addressing the local environmental impacts of the presence of unauthorized encampments, including removal of waste and debris, removal of bio-hazardous materials (e.g., used syringes, food waste, human and animal waste), scraping and removal of surface soil, and deferred repair activities. There is a large volume of deferred maintenance and landscaping work to perform within the Project Area, including trimming and/or removal of diseased trees. During the performance of the project, the project area will be closed to the public in order to accommodate the safe operation of heavy equipment and the efficient completion of necessary work. Much of the work relating to the project has been deferred due to concerns about the difficulty in moving the large number of people encamped in the area, as well as impacts on those encamped persons, which will be necessary for performing the work.

"Our concerns over the buildup of various types of debris and waste in the area have intensified, as has the need to inspect flood control facilities in the area and perform necessary maintenance and repairs," said Khalid Bazmi, Chief Engineer of the Orange County Flood Control District, in a memorandum to the County of Orange Board of Supervisors. "Therefore, in my opinion, the work cannot be delayed any further without potentially jeopardizing the flood control, water conservation and water quality mission of the Orange County Flood Control District."

Individuals who are illegally encamped in the area will be asked to voluntarily relocate from the project area beginning Jan. 22. Signage informing the public and individuals encamped in the area was posted



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on Jan. 8. A count of the number of individuals encamped in the project area will be conducted prior to the start of the project.

The County has undertaken a concerted effort, in partnership with the nonprofit CityNet, to engage in intensive case management with individuals encamped in the area to offer resources and available shelter. To date, CityNet has successfully connected more than 156 individuals to available housing and resources. These efforts will continue. Individuals who remain encamped in the project area after Jan. 22, 2018, will be subject to citation for violation of state trespass laws.

"We continue making every effort to provide viable resources for individuals encamped in the area who are willing to accept assistance," said Richard Sanchez, Director of the County's Health Care Agency, whose Outreach and Engagement teams provide behavioral health outreach on a weekly basis to individuals experiencing homelessness. "The County wants to remove any barrier that an individual may have to accepting resources."

During the project, County outreach teams in partnership with CityNet will continue to offer the opportunity to store essential personal property, kennel animals at no cost to the individual and provide free transportation to available shelter to individuals encamped in the project area.

Once the project is completed, the County will reopen the closed portion of the SART for recreational trail use during posted public access hours. The public access hours will remain the same as currently posted, November 1-February 28 from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and March 1-October 31 from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Public access hours will be actively enforced along the entirety of the SART. Individuals who access the SART outside of posted hours will be in violation of state trespass laws and subject to citation.

"The homeless encampments in the Santa Ana Riverbed pose a threat to the public's safety," said Undersheriff Don Barnes, Orange County Sheriff's Department. "The work done over the past few months by sheriff's deputies and our city law enforcement partners has confirmed that there is a criminal element in the encampment that hinders the ability for individuals willing to transition to self-sufficiency. The best way to help both the homeless and neighboring residents is to enforce public access hours and restrict the ability for individuals to encamp along the Santa Ana River Trail. Restoring the flood control channel to its intended purpose will require the cooperation of both the individuals encamped in the area and the public to adhere to the closures and public access hours along the entirety of the trail."

To encourage compliance and reinforce the publicly posted hours, the County has installed additional signage in prominent locations and will install pedestrian gates at entrances to the SART. Gate installation is anticipated to be completed in mid-2018. Once installed, the areas between the gates will be patrolled by law enforcement during public access hours.

"While we recognize that the closure will temporarily inconvenience recreational users, it is a critical step in maintaining one of the most widely used trails in the County as a safe and secure place for public use," said Dylan Wright, Director of OC Community Resources. OC Community Resources oversees OC



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Parks, the County department responsible for the maintenance of the public trail per a Memorandum of Understanding with the Orange County Flood Control District.

The County's flood control channels are maintained by the Orange County Public Works Department, acting as the OC Flood Control District, that is tasked with the responsibility of protecting Orange County from the threat of floods by designing and constructing channels, storm drains, dams, pump stations and other flood control related facilities. Flood control channels are not designed or intended for human habitation, and are not a safe place to live.

In partnership with the OC Flood Control District, these actions are being undertaken as part of a joint effort by the Orange County Sheriff's Department, OC Public Works and OC Community Resources.

For more information, please visit www.ocgov.com.

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