EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Ojai received a grant from the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) to prepare a comprehensive assessment and restoration plan for the watersheds that drain through the city limits. David Magney Environmental Consulting (DMEC), Hawks & Associates, and Concerned Resource & Environmental Workers (C.R.E.W.) have been contracted by the City to conduct the Ojai Basin streams characterization and assessment, and to make recommendations on how stream habitats within the City could be protected or restored.

The Ventura River system is ranked as the third most endangered river in the United States and is designated as critical habitat for Southern California Steelhead Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus* [a southern California Ecologically Significant Unit or ESU]), a federally listed endangered species (American Rivers [website] 2000). The river once had a large Steelhead population spawning in the upper reaches of its tributaries, including the larger San Antonio Creek watershed in the foothills of the Ojai Valley; however, Steelhead populations have declined over the years, largely due to the impact of human activities.

The predominant known problems, in regard to Steelhead habitat within the streams of the City of Ojai, include the following: fish passage, water quality, spawning habitat, and deficient stream flows. A primary purpose of the proposed assessment and restoration plan is to identify specific problems of the Ojai creeks relevant to Steelhead Trout, and develop a plan to restore fish habitat and to address the land use issues that adversely affect that habitat and the ecological health of the watersheds. The objectives of this assessment and restoration plan are to: (1) conduct a baseline assessment of the City of Ojai urban watershed; (2) identify and prioritize limiting factors to increasing Southern Steelhead populations; (3) determine and analyze the root causes of these limitations; and (4) develop specific recommendations for restoration actions.

A total of twenty-five (25) subwatersheds (approximately 2,795 acres) that support the Ojai Basin Watershed have been delineated, all but one of which are part of the San Antonio Creek watershed. The primary subwatersheds of the City of Ojai and Ojai Valley included in this study are Stewart Canyon Creek, Fox Canyon Barranca, and a portion of Thacher Creek, which are all tributaries to San Antonio Creek. Within those subwatersheds, a total of 16 creeks flow through the City of Ojai, totaling approximately 86,905 feet (35,179 meters; 16.5 miles) of creek channels. Biologists delineated 51 distinct reaches making up those 16 creeks of Ojai. Eight (8) out of the 51 stream reaches that were delineated within the City of Ojai are determined to be potentially suitable Steelhead habitat, and they include:

- Fox Canyon Reach 1;
- Ojai Reach 1;
- Post Office Reach 1;
- San Antonio Reach 1, 2, and 3; and
- Stewart Canyon Reach 1 and 5.

Actions that can be taken to restore and enhance Steelhead habitat conditions include the following:

- Remove barriers to fish migration where feasible;
- Establish minimum-width buffers between urban land uses and streams;
- Restore native riparian vegetation along streams;
- Preserve upland portions of the watershed;
- Eradicate invasive exotic plants and aquatic animals;
- Follow NOAA and CDFG fish passage guidelines at stream crossings;
- Minimize impervious surfaces on all parcels;
- Educate land owners; and
- Establish regular water quality monitoring stations.