

WATERCOURSE VEGETATION REMOVAL PERMITTING GUIDE

Wildfires in Ventura County have touched nearly every community, business, and family. Fire prevention and fuel reduction are ways we can minimize the continuing threat. Vegetation removal must balance fire risk reduction against erosion, aesthetics, and wildlife habitat considerations. Therefore, vegetation removal may be regulated by a variety of local, state, and federal agencies. Links to some helpful websites are provided in the text below.



The **Ventura County Fire Department** offers guidance to assist in developing fire safety and fuel modification plans for properties in a variety of land use settings. Check their website for fire prevention standards and guidelines, and many more resources at <https://vcfd.org/fire-hazard-reduction-program-fhrp/>.

Typically, vegetation removal within or along a watercourse may occur on private properties without a permit if **Watershed Protection District** rights-of-way and/or facilities are not affected. The District can review the proposed work and determine permit requirements if the work has potential to affect water flow and the environment. Also, any planting, grading, or altering the flow conditions of a watercourse requires a permit from the District. To verify whether a District permit is needed, please visit the website or contact the District at 805-662-6882, WP_permits@ventura.org, or <https://www.onestoppermits.vcrma.org/departments/watercourse-encroachment>.



It is incumbent upon the **landowner** or vegetation manager to obtain any permits or approvals required by other regulatory entities prior to vegetation management actions. Vegetation removal in watercourses is regulated by the California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife per Section 1600 of the Fish and Game Code (Figure 1). Other applicable regulations may include state and federal endangered species acts, and water quality protection laws (e.g. Federal Clean Water Act). Bird nesting season is from January through mid-September; removal of active nests is illegal per the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the California Fish and Game Code, therefore, fall season vegetation maintenance is recommended to avoid impacts to nesting birds.

To assist landowners with navigating regulatory requirements the **Ventura County Planning Department** developed the **Wetland Project Permitting Guide** (<https://docs.vcrma.org/images/pdf/planning/conservation/wetlands-permitting-guide.pdf>). It answers some basic questions about jurisdictions, as well as types of projects and permitting.



The District's **Planning Department** issues ministerial permits for removal of invasive and other plant species in creeks, wildlife corridors, the coastal area wetlands, and monarch butterfly overwintering sites. Check with them first to avoid potential violations (links in table on next page).

In many **cities** and in the **unincorporated areas** of Ventura County, tree trimming and removal ordinances are in place to ensure the proper management and preservation of trees, based on their species, size, historical or ecological importance, and location. Consult with the local jurisdiction to find out the rules in the specific area of interest.

Critical items:

- Avoid work in creeks during bird nesting season (February to September) unless a biologist inspects the area.
- Avoid any work in and around water in creeks without a biologist to inspect for fish, frogs, and other animals.
- Avoid refueling equipment (e.g., chainsaws) in the creek.
- Avoid storing equipment in the creek when rain is predicted.
- Avoid moving soil in the creek area.
- Consider getting liability insurance to cover potential liabilities.

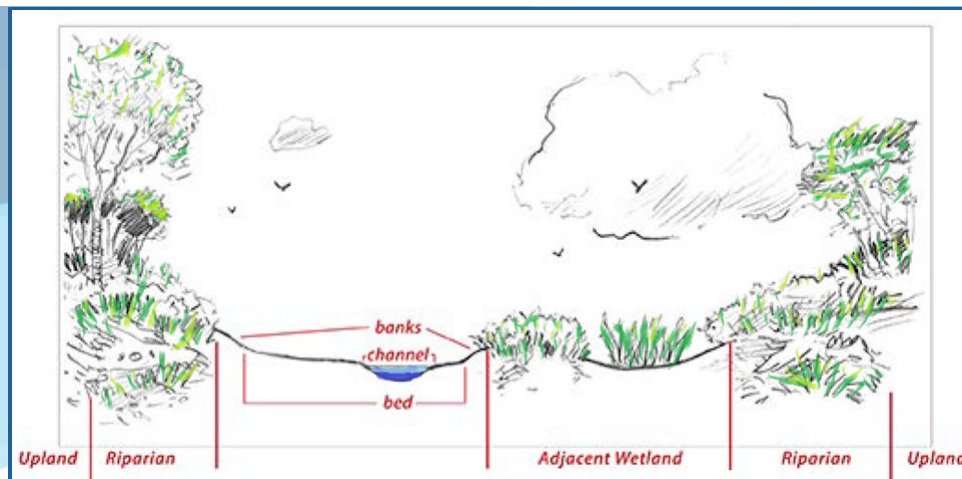


Figure 1: Depiction of potentially regulated watercourse features.

AGENCY/ REGULATION	CONTACT	LINK
Ventura County Fire Department Fire Hazard Reduction Program	805-389-9759	♦ https://vcfd.org/fire-hazard-reduction-program/
Ventura County Watershed Protection District Ordinance WP-2	805-662-6882 WP_permits@ventura.org	♦ https://www.onestoppermits.vcrma.org/departments/watercourse-encroachment
County Of Ventura Resources Management Agency Planning Division	https://rma.venturacounty.gov/divisions/planning/ to set up an appointment OR visit the public counter at the Government Center at 800 S. Victoria, Ventura	♦ VCRMA Tree Protection Ordinance FAQs ♦ VCRMA Development Permits within the Habitat Connectivity and Wildlife Corridor ♦ Ventura County Coastal Zoning Ordinance ♦ Protected Monarch Overwintering Sites
Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board Clean Water Act Section 401	Valerie Carrillo Zara 213-576-6759 Valerie.Zara@waterboards.ca.gov	♦ https://www.spl.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory/Permit-Process/ Regulatory requirements are integrated with US Army Corps of Engineers
US Army Corps of Engineers, Regulatory Division Clean Water Act Section 404	Mr. Antal Szijj 805-585-2147 Antal.J.Szijj@usace.army.mil SPLREGVentura@usace.army.mil	♦ https://www.spl.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory/Permit-Process/ USACE regulates vegetation management in watercourses that involves a discharge of dredge or fill material (e.g. mechanized clearing and grading); a permit is not needed for cutting vegetation or herbicide application.

AGENCY/ REGULATION	CONTACT	LINK
US Fish and Wildlife Service Federal Endangered Species Act	Chris Dellith 805-667-3308 Chris_Dellith@fws.gov Fw8venturasection7@fws.gov	♦ https://www.fws.gov/program/endangered-species USFWS regulates actions potentially harming federally listed species in uplands and in watercourses.
National Marine Fisheries Service Federal Endangered Species Act	Brittany Struck 909-235-9905 Brittany.Struck@noaa.gov	♦ https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/endangered-species-conservation Regulates vegetation management and grading in watercourses that may contain southern steelhead fish.
California Department of Fish and Wildlife Fish and Game Code: 1600 & 2081	Frederic (Fritz) Rieman 562-619-0605 Frederic.Rieman@wildlife.ca.gov HCPB@wildlife.ca.gov	♦ CDFW Habitat Conservation Program Regulates actions in watercourses and state-listed special status species.
City of Camarillo Community Development Department	805-388-5360 planning@cityofcamarillo.org	♦ City of Camarillo Community Development, Modification Application
City of Fillmore Fire Department	Keith Gurrola kgurrola@fillmoreca.gov 805-524-1500, ext 116	♦ City of Fillmore Wildfire Planning ♦ City of Fillmore Planning Permit ♦ Contact City of Fillmore Planning Department
City of Moorpark Community Development Department	Phillip Neumann 805-517-6230 pneumann@moorparkca.gov	♦ City of Moorpark Fire Hazard Severity Zones
City of Oxnard Planning and Environmental Services	805-385-7858 planning@oxnard.org	♦ City of Oxnard Planning Website ♦ City of Oxnard Community Development Website ♦ City of Oxnard Fire Hazard Severity Zone
City of Santa Paula Planning Department	805-933-4212 plan@spcity.org	♦ Tree Removal Permit
City of Simi Valley Planning Department	805-583-6769 enviroservices@simivalley.org	♦ City of Simi Valley Municipal Code, Tree Preservation, Cutting, and Removal
City of Thousand Oaks Planning Department	805-449-2323 planning@toaks.gov	♦ City of Thousand Oaks, Oak Tree Preservation Code
City of Ventura Planning Department	805-654-7893 planningcounter@cityofventura.ca.gov	♦ City of Ventura Planning Website

This list may not be complete or accurate. Individuals are responsible for compliance with applicable regulations.