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Contact: Jessica Lass, NRDC, 310-434-2300 or 202-468-6718 (cell)

Liz Crosson, Santa Monica Baykeeper, 310-305-9645 ext. 100, 541-944-5589 (cell)

## **LA County Ordered to Clean Up Water Pollution**

### **Untreated storm water runoff is the largest source of coastal pollution in Southern California**

LOS ANGELES (March 10, 2011) – The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a decision today finding the Los Angeles County’s Flood Control District responsible for the billions of gallons of untreated stormwater runoff it allows to pollute Southern California’s rivers and, ultimately, its most popular beaches. The decision stems from a 2008 lawsuit filed by NRDC and Santa Monica Baykeeper.

“This ruling holds LA County responsible for their massive water pollution problem,” said Aaron Colangelo, senior attorney with NRDC. “For years, the County claimed that it could never be held accountable for its toxic discharges, even if the water were so polluted that it literally caught on fire. All of that changes with this ruling. The result will be fewer illnesses, fewer beach closings, a healthier environment, and a healthier regional economy.”

This ruling affirms that the County must do more to improve water quality and protect public health and the environment. As a remedy for the violations identified by the court, NRDC and Santa Monica Baykeeper will seek a court order requiring the County to reduce runoff pollution to levels that protect public health and the environment.

“The court’s decision should be celebrated by all who value coastal and aquatic resources like recreation, natural habitats, and scenic beauty,” said Liz Crosson, Executive Director and Baykeeper of Santa Monica Baykeeper. “The decision is a critical step towards addressing water pollution in major Los Angeles waterways.”

In its decision, the federal court agreed with NRDC and the Baykeeper that Los Angeles County, through its Flood Control District, has been illegally discharging polluted water into the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers since 2003. Although the County’s monitoring in two additional rivers – the Santa Clara River and Malibu Creek – also showed violations of pollution limits, the court found that evidence did not pinpoint the County, as opposed to other dischargers, as the source of illegal levels in those waters. However, the Court left it open for NRDC and Baykeeper to revisit those claims.

### **Background**

In March 2008, NRDC and Santa Monica Baykeeper sued the County of Los Angeles for violating a 2001 Clean Water Act permit issued by California’s Regional Water Quality Control Board. The lawsuit sought to hold the county accountable to measurably reducing urban runoff, the top source of coastal water pollution in California that sickens thousands of people and fouls coastal ecosystems annually.

When it rains in Los Angeles, billions of gallons of water pour into the County’s storm drains and, carrying bacteria, pathogens, animal waste, metals, oils, and other pollutants, flow untreated into the Pacific Ocean and onto our beaches. A recent NRDC report found that in 2009, stormwater runoff was the primary known source of pollution at beaches nationwide, consistent with past years.

Stormwater pollution makes people vulnerable to a range of waterborne illnesses including stomach flu, skin rashes, pinkeye, ear, nose, and throat problems, dysentery, hepatitis, respiratory ailments, neurological disorders, and other serious health problems. For senior citizens, small children, and people with weak immune systems, the results can be fatal.

### **Related Links**

Lawsuit Charges L.A. County with Failing Clean Water Standards [www.nrdc.org/media/2008/080303.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/media/2008/080303.asp)

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