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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
EMERGENCY ACTION TAKEN IN GUADALUPE TO PREVENT OIL RELEASE

GUADALUPE, Calif.-- The State Department of Fish and Game's Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency authorized the breach of the mouth of the Santa Maria river to prevent the release of diluent, an oil product, into the ocean and to prevent an imminent threat to marine waters.

Late yesterday, OSPR personnel, responding to information provided by Unocal, found heavy rains had caused the Santa Maria river to erode sand that surrounds the steel wall that protects the high density polyethylene (HDPE) wall holding back the diluent plume. As of this morning, an additional 20 feet of the sand had been eroded by the water. The river water had eroded until it made contact with the steel wall. Only 35 feet of sand remains before the river water will circumvent the protective steel wall and wash out the HDPE wall. The breach is designed to redirect the river water away from the HDPE wall and toward the normal opening into the ocean.

Operating under authority provided in law, the OSPR worked with other State and Federal agencies who agreed that opening the

mouth of the river was the preferred option. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had granted Unocal a breaching permit earlier this year which, coupled with an emergency permit from the California Coastal Commission, authorized the action.

Crews used a D-230 Excavator, which looks like a large backhoe, to remove sand from the river mouth. Extra precautions were taken to protect the lives of the workers including lifelines and floatation vests.

The OSPR consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to minimize potential threats to sensitive species in the area.

The HDPE wall was placed into the beach at Guadalupe in 1994 after several storms had caused the beach front to erode away, exposing the diluent plume under the beach. The steel wall was placed into the beach in the fall of 1995 to protect the HDPE wall from the storms. Without that steel wall, the recent storm would have compromised the HDPE wall. The steel wall is performing as designed but, as the water moves northward, it is eroding the east bank of the river, behind the steel wall. The diluent plume is the result of several years of leaks at the Guadalupe oil field.

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