



PRESS RELEASE

Date: October 12, 2017
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PAJARO RIVER LEVEE PROJECT RAMPS UP

Spurred by several events over the past year, including project advocacy by Santa Cruz and Monterey counties and Congressman Jimmy Panetta, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has reinvigorated and accelerated the Federal Flood Risk Reduction Project on the Pajaro River, with the ultimate goal of improving levee protection for local homes and businesses.

The 2016-17 winter demonstrated the need for enhanced flood protection in the Pajaro Valley, reminding residents of historical levee failures and the dangers posed by inadequate flood protection. The floods of 1995 led to one death and over \$95 million in economic losses, including \$67 million to agricultural fields. In 1997 and 1998 flooding caused additional damage and displaced hundreds of residents, while 2016-17 storm damages to the federal levee system totaled more than \$10 million.

“As last winter’s storms showed, improved flood protection along the Pajaro River is critical to the communities and farms that depend upon the levees for protection of their homes and businesses,” Congressman Jimmy Panetta said. “I am working diligently with senior leadership at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in partnership with Santa Cruz County, Monterey County, the city of Watsonville, and the community of Pajaro, on this project and have made it a top priority and will continue to push this project forward while protecting the interests of my constituents.”

The U.S. Army Corps' San Francisco District plans to release a Draft Feasibility Study and environmental documentation in late October, with the ultimate goal of moving into the initial stages of design and project construction as soon as July 2018. The draft reports include a description of the Corps' recommended



improvements for flood risk reduction (levee improvements) along the Pajaro River system.

"While we've seen a lot of recent progress we will continue to advocate to ensure that this project remains a priority with our federal partners. With continued community and federal support we remain hopeful that we can move this project toward construction," Santa Cruz County Supervisor Zach Friend said.

Public involvement in this process, including input and support, will be critical in getting the project built and improving flood protection to the Pajaro Valley. Staff from Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, along with City of Watsonville staff, invite Pajaro Valley residents, business owners, farmers, and any other interested parties to attend a community forum prior to the Corps' release of their draft reports.

"The surrounding community is understandably concerned about the levee and has really come together and worked hard to get the project to this point. Public participation is such an integral part of successful development of a project that will protect our diverse needs," Monterey County Supervisor John Phillips said.

This meeting will be the first of several intended to provide an update on the project and a description of what to expect over the next year. Additionally, the meeting will allow interested parties to become reacquainted with the project and will provide a channel for critical public input.

If you have any questions regarding the meeting or if you are interested in having your name added to the interested stakeholder list, please contact Mark Strudley, Flood Control Division Manager for Santa Cruz County Flood Control and Water Conservation District Zone 7, at mark.strudley@santacruzcounty.us.

WHAT: Community Meeting Update on the Pajaro River Levee Project

WHEN: 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m., October 19, 2017

WHERE: Watsonville Civic Center Plaza Community Room, 275 Main St., 4th floor

Spanish translators and refreshments will be available. Two hours of free parking is available in the Civic Center Plaza Parking Garage.