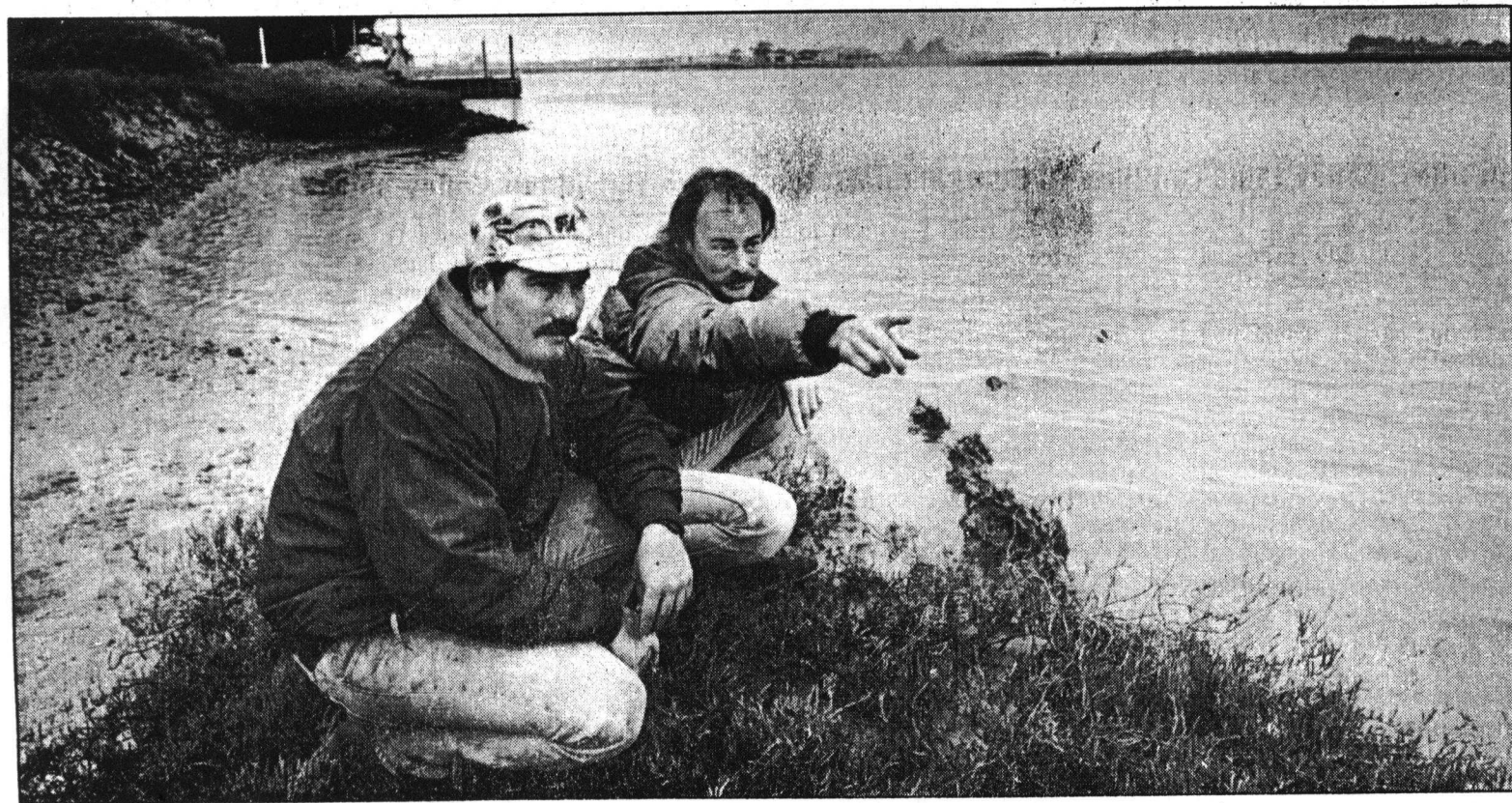


VCE Environment RP p. 1

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Elkhorn Slough washing out to sea



Kurt Ellison

David Vierra, right, shows friend Kenny Lazzerini how the tides of Elkhorn Slough have eroded the levee his family built, flooding much of his land.

Tidal action scours unique wetland

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

Elkhorn Slough, a unique ecosystem local, state and federal organizations have worked hard to preserve, is washing out to sea.

And, if it is to be saved, it will cost millions.

That is the conclusion of a recently-released study ordered by the Army Corps of Engi-

neers, which traces the problem to the creation in 1946 of a new harbor entrance channel at Moss Landing. The channel was made by the Corps by dredging the sand dunes just west of the slough at Highway 1, opening the slough directly to the bay.

Tide gates, which would have prevented — or at least slowed — the erosion, were part of the original plan. They were never

put in — it's not clear why — and the tidal action has been scouring away at the seven-mile-long slough since then, deepening and widening slough channels, eroding the marshes and causing levees to fail.

"We're watching the marshes of Elkhorn Slough disappearing into the submarine canyon," said Mark Silberstein, the director of the Elkhorn Slough Na-

tional Estuarine Research Reserve.

Private landowners have also lost land along the edges of the slough, and in at least one case, land that used to be dry is now under water permanently. Since January, when another levee failed, the portion of Elkhorn Road between Hidden Valley

See SLOUGH page 2 ►