



Tarmo Hannula, Register-Pajaronian

An aerial view shows Pajaro (right) and Watsonville divided by the meandering Pajaro River.

Pajaro River named most endangered river of 2006

Environmental group designates status; Army Corps of Engineers says report made too soon

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OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The Pajaro River received a dubious distinction this week when an environmental group named it the nation's most endangered river of 2006.

The nonprofit American Rivers group, which released the report Wednesday, blamed the river's endangered status on what it described as an "antiquated" approach to flood control by the Army Corps of Engineers.

In 1995, the Pajaro River flooded Pajaro with more than six feet of sewage-tainted water and led to the evacuation of 2,500 residents. The river burst again in 1998, forcing more than 5,000 residents to flee.

In the report, American Rivers warned that without a comprehensive flood project that focuses on watershed management and upstream wetlands, communities nearby remain at risk.

According to the report, the Corps added more than 22 miles of levees along the lower Pajaro River that were supposed to provide 50-year flood protection. Instead, the levees increased sedimentation and did little to protect residents.

The Pajaro River made the list because it is at a crucial turning point as the Corps prepares recommendations on flood protection, according to Melissa Samet, senior director of water resources at the Washington, D.C.-



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Supervisor Tony Campos (right) and Watsonville City Council member Dale Skillicorn (left) join county officials for a tour of the Pajaro River mouth to survey the river on April 5.

based group. "It could have a whole new lease on life," Samet said. "Right now it's in pretty bad shape. When you have a river stripped bare, you have a glorified drain."

American Rivers does not advocate eliminating all levees on the Pajaro River, Samet said. The group is recommending setting levees fur-

See RIVER, page 15

Flood + Flood Protection

4.22.06

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