

River levee repairs beef up protection

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SANTA CRUZ — Emergency work to repair earthquake damage to the San Lorenzo River levee has put the levee in better condition than before the quake, Army Corps of Engineer inspectors said Friday.

Seven engineers from the Corps made a final walking inspection of the \$1.2 million repair project.

"They did a good job," said John Azeveda, the Corp's resident engineer. "Right on schedule."

The deadline for the project was Friday.

"It's all yours," Azeveda said to Dick McKinney, operations manager for the city Public Works Department. McKinney's department is responsible for levee maintenance.

Granite Construction did the work, initially working 12-hour shifts, seven days a week. That relaxed last month as it became apparent the project was ahead of schedule.

"I'm glad we didn't have any rain," Azeveda said. "That would have turned it into a real challenge. It was enough challenge as it was."

The levee slumped in several places because of the quake. It also suffered long horizontal cracks. The paved surface that runs parallel to the river between San Lorenzo Drive buckled and cracked in several places.

There was concern that if the river rose and reached the cracks, water would begin to wash the levee away, possibly flooding the

low-lying Beach Flats and the Riverside Avenue-Canfield Street neighborhoods.

Two days after the quake, Army Corps commander Lt. Gen. Henry Hatch surveyed the damaged levee and declared it in bad shape.

Granite rebuilt several portions and compacted others. Workers also added riprap to most of the exposed surface.

Engineers said the repair work restored the levee to the level it was when it was built in 1959. Even before the earthquake, the levee had settled over the years, said engineer Al Mathiesen. "We put it back to the height it was originally designed," Mathiesen said.

He said the city will end up with better protection than before the earthquake.

But because siltation has raised the level of the river's bed, flood protection is not up to the same level as when the levee was first built. An unrelated Army Corps study recommends adding 3-foot flood walls to the levee's surface.

A feasibility study funded by the Corps and the city will begin next year.

Scott Wilson, a Corps engineer based in San Francisco, said the wall project is scheduled to begin in 1993, provided a decision is made to start building after the study.

The removal of the Riverside Street bridge will help the city's flood situation. The bridge is nearly demolished. Construction of a new bridge will begin early next year.

REFERENCE