

# River capacity improved; more work needed

## Pajaro keeps rebuilding from the flood of 1995

*Editor's note: The two articles on this page look at the Pajaro River flood of March 11, 1995, and the recovery efforts since. Articles on Pajaro Middle School and how two businesses have recovered will appear Monday.*

By LANE WALLACE

STAFF WRITER

**WATSONVILLE** — The cleanup work after the flood of March 1996 increased the amount of water the Pajaro River can handle, but not so much that there's no cause for concern.

County supervisor Ray Belgard said he feels better about the river, but won't relax until "the projects get built."

The projects are levee construction and a series of pump stations on Salsipuedes and Corralitos creeks, which flow into the Pajaro River.

When those projects will be

done hasn't been determined — it is dependent in large part on the Army Corps of Engineers. Some of the money for the projects would come from Zone 7, the agency formed four years ago for Pajaro Valley flood control.

The flood came in the early morning of Saturday, March 11, when the Pajaro River levee broke near Murphy's Crossing. There were a number of other breaks, and millions of gallons poured out the Monterey County side of the river, flooding the town of Pajaro and surrounding fields.

There was four feet of water in Pajaro that weekend, and all residents were evacuated.

Farmers angrily blamed—and later sued—various public agencies, saying the flooding was caused by the failure to clear vegetation from the river bank for more than 20 years.



**Salinas Road was still under water when this photo was taken several days after the flood of March 11, 1995.**

Michael McCollum

County supervisors authorized a \$3.5 million channel-clearing project, completed last summer.

Belgard, who grew up in the Pajaro Valley and remembers seeing

the downtown flooded in 1938 and an 8-year-old, had been urging stream-clearing measures for several years before the flood, and was instrumental in forming Zone 7.

Some storms this winter have been as strong as last year's, Belgard said, and the river "has only come up within four feet" of the top.

Brian Turpen, assistant public

works director for Santa Cruz County, agrees with Belgard. "It's got to be common sense that we're in

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