

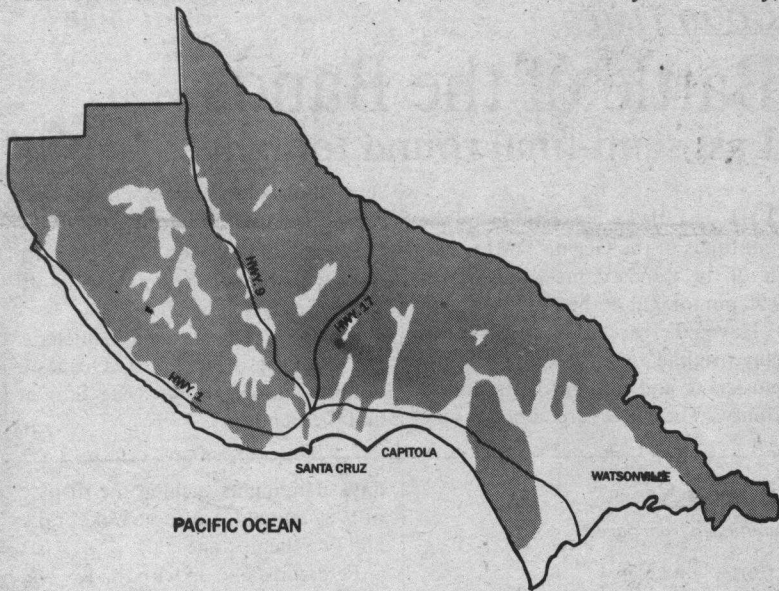
Controlling Erosion

1 million tons of topsoil lost each year in county

A BIG December storm hits Santa Cruz, dumping several inches of rain and creating a series of miniature streams around your home. The strip of bare ground that used to be your driveway is now a rutted, muddy mess; water seeping through your foundation causes your basement to resemble a miniature lake.

As locals learned in the winters of '81-'82 and '82-'83, such a scene isn't exactly rare in Santa Cruz County. In years of mild or normal rainfall, erosion and flooding can be major problems, said Rich Casale, local representative of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.

Santa Cruz County has "a very,



80% of the county has high risk of soil loss

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very high erosion danger," said Casale, with about 80 percent of the land classified exceeding tolerable soil loss standards. Casale said that figure greatly exceeds similar percentages for other counties.

Santa Cruz County loses 1 million tons of topsoil through various forms of erosion each year, according to the Santa Cruz Resource Conservation District. Casale said the county's susceptibility to soil loss is mainly due to the steepness of the terrain, the sand-

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News

Erosion

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iness of the soil and the boom in development in rural areas.

Construction in the San Lorenzo Valley has been a main culprit. In 1973, a heavy rainfall year, watersheds in the area lost as much as 12 tons of soil per acre. That compares with an erosion rate of one ton per acre that occurs naturally (with no-man-made development in the area). It is estimated soil is replaced at rate of only one- to two-tons per acre each year.

Erosion isn't just a problem in high rainfall years. "The biggest factor is the intensity of the rain," said Casale. "A lot of rain falling in a short period can be more damaging than relatively high amounts that are spread out over the whole year."

In addition to creating problems for homeowners in the mountains, erosion causes other problems as well:

- ✓ When nutrient-rich topsoil is washed away, it is harder for other plants to grow, compounding the erosion potential in future winters;
- ✓ Eroded soil buries spawning grounds. A "major decline" in the Steelhead Trout population of the San Lorenzo River has occurred because of silt covering the gravel streambed, which is used for spawning, according to the conservation district;
- ✓ Flood risk is increased in streams and creeks. Sand levels in the San Lorenzo Riverbed alone build to a depth of eight to 12 feet above normal in some downstream areas, causing a greater possibility of flooding.

With winter rains coming, the Santa Cruz County Resource Con-

servation District has announced its third annual erosion control month, Sept. 15 through Oct. 15. During this time, normally the busiest of the year for erosion and flood preparation, the conservation district offers the following advice:

- ✓ Seed bare spots around your home with special "erosion mix." Though several types of seed mixtures are marketed, the best concoction is composed of Rose Clover, "Blando" Brome, "Zorro Annual Fescue" and creeping Red Fescue. This mixture not only holds the soil, but also helps replenish nitrogen so other vegetation can grow in the future. The erosion mix should be planted before Oct. 15;

- ✓ Clear drains around your home. Casale said that a great deal of unnecessary soil loss and flooding occurs simply because drains aren't checked and cleared;

- ✓ Correct existing erosion problems before rains start. Conservation district workers will inspect your property free of charge and can recommend contractors who can help fix any inadequacies;

- ✓ If you live near a stream, special devices can be installed to deflect the current and cut down on the erosion of stream banks. Casale warns that such devices, the most common of which are "gabion baskets," should be installed only with the help of a soil conservation expert. Improper installation can cause more erosion of the banks than would normally occur or cause increased erosion downstream.

For more information or brochures on erosion control, phone the resource conservation office at 688-1562. •