

Flood warning sounded

Fissures in river levees must be repaired

By TOM LONG
Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ — Deep fissures along the levees of the San Lorenzo and Pajaro rivers caused by last week's quake could result in widespread flooding if a major storm were to hit this area in the next month, according to Army Corps of Engineer experts.

On Thursday, Lt. Gen. Henry J. Hatch, the commander of the Corps, surveyed the damage done to the levee near the River Street Bridge here.

"The people in this neighborhood

should be reasonably concerned," Hatch said. "We are."

"They see a danger we also see," said former mayor and current river watchdog Bruce Van Allen, who accompanied Hatch on his walk along the cracked and torn bike path at the levee's top. "To have this (earthquake) compounded by a flood would really wipe out Santa Cruz."

Corps engineers said that because of the deep fissures that run along the levee from the River Street bridge to the sea, the levee would have to be completely re-

built. And the Corps will try and accomplish that rebuilding before Dec. 1.

"This levee is not in shape to take much water," said one engineer who did not want to be identified. "The whole levee from Riverside Drive down on both sides is going to have to be replaced."

At the same time that the Corps will be supervising repairs along the San Lorenzo it will also be in charge of rebuilding about 7,000 feet of levee along the Pajaro River in Watsonville.

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The Santa Cruz project is expected to begin next week and will cost about \$1.2 million; the Pajaro project should start soon afterward and is expected to cost about \$700,000. Federal funds will pay for both projects.

"Our main concern is to restore flood protection before Dec. 1," Hatch said.

Hatch walked along the cracked bike path Thursday, pausing every few yards so that pictures could be taken of him inspecting the area. His camouflage uniform, close-cropped hair and military demeanor were in sharp contrast to Van Allen's long hair and beard.

Hatch picked dirt up in his hands and studied the soil, leaned over and peered down into huge cracks in the earth, and asked questions of a swarm of engineers who followed in his wake.

"If this had happened while somebody was jogging along here, that would have been quite a surprise, huh?" Hatch joked to the crowd of aides around him.

Hatch said that aside from the levee projects, 300 additional engineers from the Corps had been flown into Santa Cruz County from as far away as Omaha, Galveston, Little Rock and Hawaii to help the Federal Emergency Management Agency assess damage to homes and businesses.

Hatch, an engineer with a West Point background, also toured the Pacific Garden Mall Thursday just



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Lt. Gen. Henry J. Hatch straddles a fissure in the river levee.

before demolition of some buildings there began. He said he was impressed that most of the newer buildings there had withstood the quake so well.

"If we had not had continued evolution and enforcement of local building codes, the damage would

have been a lot worse," Hatch said.

But according to one Corps engineer, there is only so much that can be done to protect river levees against similar disasters.

"You can't really design a levee to take an earthquake like this," the engineer said.