

'Monster' grabbing at Watsonville home

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WATSONVILLE — What started as a seemingly harmless hairline fracture on the surface around their home six months ago has grown to enormous proportions for a retired Watsonville couple.

Marcelina and Jose Gomez live in a tiny, gray wooden house adjacent to Highway 1. They have seen the fracture turn into a major cave-in to the point their home is now being threatened.

Motorists can see about six feet of the Gomez house now overhanging a steep ravine. That ravine formerly was only a slightly sloping hillside below the flat pad of the house.

Like an underground monster, however, the fracture has grown inch by inch during the past six months. But until last week's pre-winter storm, no piece of earth larger than a few inches had broken off. A 10-foot section broke off Thursday.

Today, a wide swath of the road running in front of the Gomez house is gone. The Gomez's long driveway has also disappeared and the lone access now is along a steep, muddy hillside and a quick duck through a hole in the fence.

Nobody knows what is causing the problem. It has,

however, placed the Gomez's in a very precarious — and teetering — situation.

With the breaking of the 10-foot section, the strong-willed Marcelina Gomez admits she is finally becoming nervous and scared.

"Up to now it has been a slow, inch to inch thing," she says. "There hadn't been any one day where we'd lose a lot."

"This is the first time I really feel nervous," she adds. "We don't want to lose it. I never realized how much I loved this house until now."

The Gomez's built the house themselves 22 years ago, "putting in every nail," according to Marcelina.

They have no intentions of seeing that work destroyed.

They have installed five large steel beams that literally are holding up their dining room — the section of the house that is overhanging the ravine.

Marcelina admits she's nervous about stepping into the dining room. "We eat all our meals in the kitchen," she says, smiling.

The Gomez's poured the cement and installed the beams.

What is left of the hillside has been covered with

sheets of plastic to prevent further saturation.

The county Public Works Department has constantly patched the road in order to keep at least one lane open.

The latest storm again made it impassable.

Since Ridgeway Road is used by five other families further up the hill, such patchwork is critical for the

residents. They want the access available in case of emergencies. County road crews were out again Friday.

The best guess geologists

and soil experts have given the Gomez's is that the fracture may have been caused by an underground river. They say the abundance of rain last winter

may have picked up the water level, simply causing the earth to cave in.

All the Gomez's know for sure is that their problem worsens.



Marcelina Gomez and her husband, Jose, are living on the brink

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