

Park residents wonder, wait



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

The deck at right is all that remains of David Drivon's coach at Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park, which sits next to the Noble Gulch Creek culvert. The culvert is now reconnected and mostly reburied.

Capitola - 2011

Homeowners, renters struggle to clean up

By J.M. BROWN and SHANNA MCCORD
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CAPITOLA — As Capitola business owners continued the muddy task of cleaning up their village shops and restaurants Tuesday, residents who also were hit hard by last week's floods struggled to restore their damaged homes, using large fans to dry floors and walls as they threw away mold-laden furniture.

After Noble Gulch Creek sent a raging river through Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park, the water rushed across the street down Riverview Drive before angling to the left down Blue Gum Avenue toward Riverview



LARISSA MUELLER/SENTINEL

John Milner spends his Tuesday ripping up water-damaged linoleum in his vacation rental properties on Riverview Avenue in Capitola. Saturday's storm and the resulting flood in Capitola raged through this section of the city and poured into Soquel Creek.

MORE INSIDE

- State urges homeowners, businesses to use licensed contractors for rebuilding, **B1**
- Environmental and health concerns at the fore, **B1**

3 30 11

Second sinkhole found at Pacific Cove

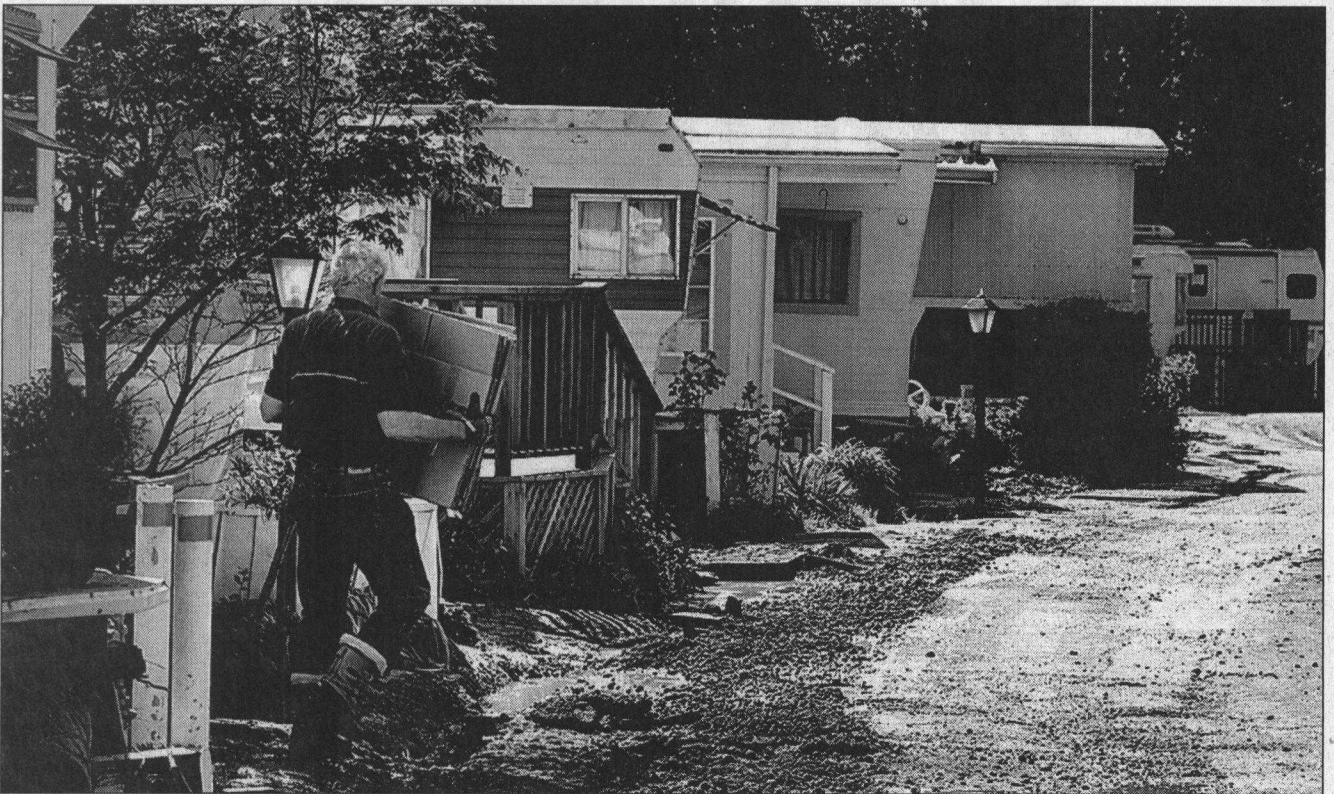
By TOVIN LAPAN
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CAPITOLA — Corey Drivon was in Seattle taking a firefighters exam Thursday when the ground beneath his house in Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park gave way, collapsing into a hole where rushing water from a ruptured drainpipe had eroded the foundation.

By the time the Cabrillo College student returned Sunday, the now structurally unsound house his family owned and all of his belongings had been destroyed.

He did not dwell on the video games, photos, yearbook and catcher's mitt from his championship high school team that would never be recovered. Instead, Drivon did the only thing anyone living in the area hit by two floods could do: He looked ahead and asked how he could help others whose homes were still salvageable.

"I'm trying to get involved any way I can,"



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Fifteen-year Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park resident Bob Coble brings boxes to his coach on Tuesday to pack up belongings while his mobile home dries out.

COVE

Continued from A1

Drivon, 18, said. "Some of the people are older or just need a hand. I can help them get their possessions out of their homes or shovel the mud. It sucks that my house got taken out, but there is no sense crying about it."

After the pipe that carries Noble Gulch Creek underneath Bay Avenue and the mobile home park failed during a downpour Thursday, resulting in a flash flood, another storm brought more rain early Saturday morning before repairs could be finished. A second and more destructive flash flood sent 2 to 3 feet of water washing through the mobile home park and Capitola Village.

The estimate for damages to city property is now \$10 million. No estimate is available yet of damage to personal property and businesses.

In addition to the second wave of destruction that affected mobile homes spared two days earlier, on Monday city officials discovered a new sinkhole between two coaches. As inspections uncover more infrastructure problems, the timeline for returning residents to their homes becomes more unclear and some residents are expressing reluctance to live in the park.

FATE OF HOMES STILL UNCERTAIN

In all 26 people, in 18 homes, live in the city-owned mobile home park full time. There are another 26 spaces that are vacation or part-time homes, according to the city.

Some have gone to stay with family or friends, while the rest have been put up in the Capitola Inn by the city. The Red Cross is providing assistance, and gave Drivon a debit card so he could buy some clothes.

"Everyone has been very helpful, and the Capitola Inn is nice, but not quite like home," Drivon said. "There are neighbors around, and we are trying to help one another out."

After the initial flood, the four homes closest to the hole were red-tagged by build-

ing inspectors. Two of those, Drivon's and another, vacant city-owned coach, have been demolished.

After Saturday's deluge, another five coaches were red-tagged. Many of the park's homes are on supports lifting them off the ground. During the flood, potted plants and other debris went under the homes and knocked loose some supports. At least two of the homes were flooded inside, and there are additional concerns over water damage and mold.

It is thought that the sinkhole found in between two coaches Monday is related to the erosion caused by Thursday's pipe failure. The area will have to be addressed before residents can enter the two homes, but Public Works Director Steve Jesberg said the coaches will not necessarily have to be demolished.

"People are afraid to live in park long term," said resident Larry Machado, who lives with his daughter and granddaughter. "I'm not going to fight Mother Nature. I can't sell until the city decides what to do with the park. I'll most likely move as soon as possible. Residents are worried about future problems. They just don't trust it."

PACIFIC COVE'S PAST AND FUTURE

According to Capitola historian Carolyn Swift, Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park, and the surrounding area, has a long history as a public area and campground. In the late 1800s the area was a public picnic ground for residents. The area slowly evolved into a campground, and then a trailer park. By 1920, the first culvert that channels Noble Gulch Creek under Bay Avenue had been built. By 1941 it was the River Villa auto campground, and then later was sold and dubbed the Capitola Auto Court in 1954.

The infrastructure in the park has developed over long periods of time, city officials said. A new culvert was installed around the 1960s, Jesberg said. The pipe that failed Thursday is 30 years old.

Before 1983, when the city bought the mobile home park,

there were two levels and more than 80 spaces. Now there are about half as many spaces, after the city turned the upper level into a parking lot.

The city is working to inspect the remaining drain-pipe and planning for repairs. Before a new pipe section can be installed the existing pipe will have to be inspected, either by a person or a camera sent down the 72-inch pipe.

The pipe does not follow the path of the road and runs beneath some homes, so if damage is found further down the line, the reopening of the park could be further delayed.

PG&E still has to install a gas main to replace one damaged in the Thursday flood. Utilities have to be restored to the park, and residents will need to address repairs to the coaches.

"We will know a lot more in the next couple days," Jesberg said. "The park could be reopened by the end of the week, or it could take longer depending on the extent of the damage. It depends on the pipeline inspection."

Several crews were at work in the park Tuesday. Granite Construction was still clearing the trench where the pipe rupture occurred. More than 20 workers from the California Conservation Corps were shoveling mud from away from the homes.

The city, which encouraged residents to get into their homes and remove anything that got wet, made accommodations for access. A lot of heavy machinery is going in and out of the park, access is sometimes problematic, and at least a few residents, some of whom are more than 90 years old, have not been in the park to work on their coaches, city officials said.

Residents have to deal with unscrupulous people drawn to disasters as well. Signs have been posted around the mobile home park warning residents to only use licensed contractors. Machado went to inspect his home Monday to find his daughter's brand-new bike had been stolen.

"To take advantage of other people's misery like that is just ridiculous," he said.

Machado believes his flood insurance will cover the

repairs to his home, which include cleaning out debris and soot from underneath the structure, replacing insulation that got wet, and repairing heating ducts.

The pipe underground was never much on the minds of residents before, but certainly is now.

"The owner who had the place before us lived there since the '50s," said Corey's father, David Drivon, who bought the mobile home more than four years ago. "He mentioned that the pipe ran beneath the street, but I didn't investigate it much, and never thought it would be a problem."

STATE OF EMERGENCY

After Capitola held a special council meeting Sunday to declare an emergency, the county Board of Supervisors met Tuesday evening to approve a resolution declaring a state of emergency.

Paul Horvat, the county's emergency services manager, said there are state guidelines for the financial threshold that must be crossed before counties and municipalities receive state aid. In this case, the guideline is \$750,000. The preliminary damage estimate for the county from last week's storms, not including Capitola or any other incorporated city, now stands at more than \$8 million, "so I don't think we'll have any problem getting an emergency declaration," he said.

The state will send a team to verify the damage. The state will pay 75 percent of the total damage, he said, and if the county can get a presidential declaration, the federal government would pay 18 percent of the remaining amount.

But he added that the federal government also has issued guidelines rather than a strict threshold, and that guideline is \$44 million.

Horvat could not estimate how long it will take to obtain those declarations.

"We're still waiting to hear on the tsunami," he said, referring to the \$28.5 million in damages caused by the March 11 tsunami that struck the Santa Cruz harbor.

Sentinel staff writer Kimberly White contributed to this report.