

# City rails at Corps order to ax trees

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SANTA CRUZ — City officials are strongly objecting to an Army Corps of Engineers' order to remove trees and sandbars in the San Lorenzo River north of the Highway 1 bridge by Oct. 1.

The Corps maintains the work is necessary to remove obstructions in the river for adequate flood-control protection.

But city officials maintain flood-control protection would not be improved and could possibly be made

worse by the removal of old trees that help curb bank erosion.

And, they say, the sandbars will be scoured out by Mother Nature during heavy winter rains, so it makes no sense to spend the money to remove the sand bars now.

Besides, city officials don't want the section of the river north of the bridge to start looking like the section south of the bridge — a bare, sandy strip that looks like a construction site on the Mojave desert.

Trying to avoid a confrontation with the Corps, city officials are hoping the Corps will agree to meet

— and be convinced by new hydraulic studies now being done by the city that the work is not necessary.

"We're not trying to attack the Corps. We're just saying, 'hey, let's look at the new information we have,'" said Bruce Van Allen, chairman of the city's River Task Force.

Van Allen said the city was surprised to receive the order from the Corps.

Since the flood control channel was built by the Corps in the 1950s, the city has had the responsibility of maintenance.

But Van Allen said this is the first time the Corps has asked for this particular work to be done.

Corps' construction-operations division chief Jack Farless notified the city in August that failure to maintain the channel "in a satisfactory manner" could result in the city's being ineligible for federal assistance in the event of a future flood.

Farless said accumulation of silt in the channel "remains a major concern" of his office. He ordered a

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Flood Prevention

came a morning newspaper.

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list of maintenance jobs to be done by the city.

Van Allen, Public Works Director Larry Erwin and River Task Force members agree to the need for many of the jobs on the list — in fact, some have already been done as part of routine maintenance.

The city countered the Corps' order with a proposed "flood-control project maintenance action plan" that takes into account hydraulic and biological studies to support the keeping of the vegetation and sandbars in question.

City Council members recently approved hiring a biological consultant to study the effects of vegetation in the river with respect to flood-control.

Task force members also will be addressing a request by the Corps to thin the willows along the river near San Lorenzo Park.

In addition, council members have agreed to fund a study on sandbars.

Van Allen believes the city's position to oppose the tree and sandbar removal will be supported by the Department of Fish and Game. City officials plan to meet Tuesday with Fish and Game officials.

But Van Allen noted the city is breaking some new ground in the West Coast world of flood-control projects.

"As far as anyone knows, this is the first time the scouring effects of the river have been taken into account on a flood-control project," said Van Allen.

Van Allen said the Corps has "unofficially" agreed that the cost of maintaining the channel as it is for flood-control purposes would be more expensive over a 50-year period than making some major changes to the channel, Van Allen said.

Those changes include tearing down the Riverside Avenue bridge; removing older, upstream portions of the Water Street bridge and adding one to three feet to the levees in certain spots.

The design of the old Riverside Avenue bridge is considered the largest single source of flood danger

in the city. Some scientists say the bridge could cause the water level to rise by as much as six feet during high-water flows.

A task force report says it must be replaced by a bridge with a single span. One possibility is construction of a new bridge at the foot of Ocean Street.

Protecting downtown from floods — and convincing the federal government that there is protection — is the first charge of the task force. Until the federal government agrees the city is safe from a once-in-a-hundred-year flood, the properties in flood-prone areas are subject to development restrictions. The restrictions bind properties in downtown and Beach Flats.

Task force members also are involved in plans to beautify the river and will be working with other city committees to make the river a magnet for economic development.

In the end, Van Allen hopes the flood control channel will be invisible and that the river will be a showplace.